The role of the learning support teacher in facilitating learner engagement

By

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Mini dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education at Stellenbosch University

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March 2021

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT (SUMMARY)

Learner engagement is a multi-dimensional construct that is prominently used as the conceptual framework for understanding why learners leave school early. This framework has also been used to investigate and establish intervention strategies to prevent learners from becoming disengaged in the schooling context. Within the South African context, reports from the Department of Education have indicated that the number of learners dropping out of school is rising, and this could be due to a large number of learners failing a grade and subsequently needing to repeat the grade. The South African government has implemented a continuum of support models in which more support structures are introduced into schools to help struggling learners. One such support structure introduced by the Western Cape Education Department is learning support teachers.

Learning support teachers are appointed to provide academic and emotional support to academically struggling learners. Research has shown that struggling academically can be an early risk factor for disengaging and leaving school early. Learning support teachers thus play a mediating role in facilitating intervention strategies for learner engagement. This study investigates how learner engagement is facilitated within the schooling context by specialised support staff – learning support teachers.

To investigate the role that learning support teachers play in facilitating learner engagement in school, the researcher used a basic qualitative enquiry situated within a social-constructionist paradigm. The researcher made use of purposive sampling to recruit six participants. Thereafter, an online platform was used to conduct semi-structured interviews. Participants were also asked to complete narrative texts in which they shared support stories with the researcher. The researcher additionally used reflective field notes during the data gathering phase of the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the raw data and establish various themes.

The data ultimately showed that learning support teachers play a role in facilitating learner engagement, but this is limited to the learners referred for support. These learning support teachers enable learners to engage in their small group context by implementing different teaching strategies and taking time to build trusting relationships with the learners. It is worth noting that many of the strategies used by learning support teachers can be applied in the mainstream classroom. The data also

emphasised the contextual barriers and other related school factors that influence learners' ability to engage in school such as overcrowded classrooms.

Keywords:

Learner engagement, learning support teachers, support strategies

OPSOMMING

Leerlingbetrokkenheid is ’n multidimensionele konstruk wat gebruik word as die prominente konseptuele raamwerk om te verstaan waarom leerders vroeg die skool verlaat. Hierdie raamwerk is ook gebruik om intervensiestrategieë te ondersoek en vas te stel hoekom leerders van skool en die skoolomgewing ontkoppel. Binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks is daar gevind dat sommige leerders skool verlaat sonder om matriek te behaal en een van die moontlike redes hiervoor kan die hoë aantal retensiegevalle binne grade wees. Die Suid-Afrikaanse regering het ’n kontinuum van ondersteuningsmodelle ingestel waar meer ondersteuningstrukture in skole ingestel is om leerders wat sukkel, te help. Een so ’n ondersteuningstruktuur wat in die Wes-Kaap Onderwysdepartement ingestel is, was leerondersteuningsonderwysers.

Leerondersteuningonderwysers word aangestel om akademiese en emosionele ondersteuning te bied aan leerders wat sukkel. Navorsing het getoon dat akademiese probleme een van die eerste risikofaktore kan wees vir die ontkoppeling van ’n leerling van die skoolkonteks. Leerondersteuningonderwysers speel dus ’n bemiddelende rol in die fasilitering van leerderbetrokkenheid in skole, aangesien hulle met leerders werk wat akademies onder-presteer. Hierdie studie het ten doel gehad om te ondersoek hoe leerderbetrokkenheid binne die skoolkonteks gefasiliteer word deur gespesialiseerde ondersteuningspersoneel, naamlik leerondersteuningsonderwysers.

Om die rol te ondersoek wat leerondersteuningsonderwysers speel om leerderbetrokkenheid te fasiliteer op skool, het die navorser ’n basiese kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetode gebruik wat binne ’n sosiaal-konstruksionistiese paradigma geleë is. Doelgerigte steekproefneming is gebruik om ses deelnemers te werf. Hierna het semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude aanlyn plaasgevind. Deelnemers is ook gevra om verhalende tekste te voltooi waar hulle ondersteuningsverhale met die navorser gedeel het. Die navorser het ook reflektiewe veldnotas bygehou tydens die data-insamelingsfase van hierdie studie. Tematiese ontleding is gebruik om die onbewerkte data te ontleed en verskillende temas daar te stel.

Die data het getoon dat leerondersteuningsonderywsers ’n rol speel in die fasilitering van leerderbetrokkenheid, maar dat hulle rol beperk is tot die leerders wat vir ondersteuning verwys word. Leerondersteuningsonderwysers maak ’n verskil in leerders se vermoë om tydens lesse in ’n kleingroepkonteks betrek te word deur

gedifferensieerde onderrigstrategieë te implementeer en tyd te neem om vertrouensverhoudings met hul leerders te bou. Baie van hierdie strategieë wat deur leerondersteuningsonderwysers gebruik word, is egter strategieë wat ook in ’n hoofstroomklaskamer gebruik kan word.

Sleutelwoorde:

Leerderbetrokkenheid, leerondersteuningsonderwysers, leerondersteuning strategieë

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my parents, specifically my mother, who encouraged me to finish my thesis although many days, I wanted to throw in the towel. Mom, you always emphasised the importance of tertiary education and made many sacrifices to allow me to go and study. You always believed in me even when I had many doubts.

To my loving and very patient husband, Jan: Thank you for allowing me to pursue this dream. Sometimes, it was to the detriment of your happiness and aspirations. I know that you still do not know the title or subject of my thesis, but you believed in me every step of the way. I owe you a few trips overseas 😊. Thank you for being there to support and encourage me.

Thank you to Alexis Andraos! My friend and mentor: You were part of the journey from the beginning. Thank you for silencing the 'inner critic' and calming my nerves countless times.

Mrs Collair, thank you for navigating me through this journey. You are a source of strength and belief, especially during the COVID pandemic. Your trust in my ability to finish never wavered.

Lastly, to my participants: Without you, this thesis would not have been possible. You guys offered up your time during a very stressful period of 2020. I thank you for being willing to attempt interviews online and share all your expertise.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1.1 School engagement within the international context

In recent years, the construct of school engagement has been used as the primary conceptual framework in understanding school dropout before graduation (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Christenson, Wylie, & Reschly, 2012; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Anataramian, 2008). Thus, school engagement has gained international attention in psychology to understand the phenomenon of early school leavers. Researchers have also used school engagement to inform intervention strategies that aim to keep students engaged and on track for graduation (Sinclair et al., 2014).

School engagement theorist, Finn (1989) developed one of the first 'frustration/self-esteem' models to understand early school dropout. Finn (1989) built on his seminal theory and developed a second model to explain school dropout called the 'participation-identification model' (Christenson et al., 2012). In both of these models, Finn (1989) included three factors that influenced school completion: school performance, behaviours and psychological factors (Christenson et al., 2012).

From this important theory regarding school dropout, many different theories and conceptual frameworks have been developed to understand the reasons for leaving school early. For instance, Christenson and Reschly (2010) developed a successful intervention programme for at-risk learners known as Check and Connect using school engagement and relationship-building (Sinclair et al., 2014). Skinner et al. (2009) developed the research field of school engagement further by combining motivation and school engagement to ascertain why some learners stay engaged and some become disengaged. Through these research initiatives, additional insight has been gained as to why learners leave school early.

The school engagement theory to explain the reasons behind learners leaving school early has also gained attention. Leaving school early affects the specific individual and has consequences for society (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012). Individuals may encounter difficulties in finding employment options that meet their

living costs, increasing their risk of poverty (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012). Due to the increased risk of poverty, early school leavers are likely to suffer from poor health or struggle accessing the health system (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Fredricks, 2011; Henry et al., 2012). The lack of access to measures that ensure adequate basic living standards places these school leavers at risk of engaging in criminal activities to survive and to provide for their families (Fredricks, 2011; Henry et al., 2012).

The consequences for the community could include limited economic growth due to the high unemployment rate among early school leavers (Christenson et al., 2012). With no discernible skills for employment, early school leavers do not contribute to the income tax system, state or province in which they reside as effectively as their counterparts who finished school (Christenson et al., 2012). Furthermore, these early school leavers likely rely on social grants or unemployment benefits to survive, consequently generating further social cost for their community (Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012). In other words, leaving school early would negatively affect the specific individuals and the community in which they reside.

Given the above, it is clear that school engagement needs to be investigated to negate the adverse effects on early school leavers. It is clear that school engagement is an essential construct for all role players within society in order to understand and ultimately to use in preventing school dropout. Through active engagement in school, students have a better chance of being successful and productive community members. With the already high poverty levels in South Africa, keeping learners engaged in schooling is crucial for their betterment.

1.1.2 The South African schooling context

South Africa and its educational system underwent a significant reform after the political transition from the apartheid system to democracy. This transitional period disseminated critical changes within the educational system because education was used as a driving force behind the apartheid ideology (Spaull, 2013). Changes within the education sector mainly involved inclusion of all learners in the schooling context and a unified schooling system.

As stated above, one of the critical changes that the educational system underwent was the attempt to ensure access and quality education for all learners. The South

African government made this commitment through the World Declaration on 'Education for All' in Dakar, 2000. Although the South African government made this commitment more than 20 years ago, it became apparent that not all learners can access quality education during an international pandemic such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. To keep learners safe during the coronavirus outbreak, the method by which education was provided moved onto a digital platform. Due to the major socio-economic inequalities in South Africa, not all learners could access online platforms and thus could not sustain the same educational input as learners in affluent areas. However, it is still essential to understand the educational reform of the South African government to ensure access to quality education for all learners.

As the first step in ensuring quality education for all, the South African government revised the compulsory school going age in the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The revised law indicates the compulsory school going age as the "first school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of seven years until the last school day of the year in which such learner reaches the age of fifteen years or the ninth grade, whichever occurs first" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6). This Act showcases the commitment of the South African government to ensuring access to education for all learners of school going age (Fleisch et al., 2012).

However, the South African government's commitment during the 2000 World Declaration in Dakar was more than simply ensuring learners' access to schooling. Quality education also implies "meaningful learning and progression to secondary and higher levels of education" (Sayed & Motala, 2012, p. 105). The post-apartheid South African government addressed the need for quality education for all by creating the Education White Paper 6 (2001). This policy framework set out to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability, are included within the broader educational context, enabling them to one day participate within society as equal members (Department of Basic Education, 2001). In other words, the government set out to ensure access to education for all learners and attempted to guarantee that learners become functional members of society and contribute to the economy.

The Education White Paper 6 (2001) is a policy document developed to assist the South African Department of Education in developing and implementing a more flexible curriculum in order to ensure access for all learners by integrating support services throughout the educational system (Department of Basic Education, 2001). The driving force of this policy document was creating district-based support teams to provide professional support services to all schools (Department of Basic Education, 2001). Furthermore, the vital strategy of the Department of Basic Education in the creation of the Education White Paper 6 was to mobilise the out-of-school youth of school going age and the learners who were facing barriers to learning**.** Ultimately, the government attempted to ensure that all members of society had access to quality education by providing all learners with the additional support structures as set out in the Education White Paper 6 (2001).

Although the Department of Education has made great strides since the political reform by implementing supportive legislative frameworks such as the Education White Paper 6 (2001) and amending the South African Schools Act of 1996, many learners are still out of school. In 2017, 495 000 learners were 'out-of-school learners' (Department of Basic Education, 2017). Of the 495 000 learners who were out of school, 2.6% (12 870) were found to be of school going age according to the General Household Survey of 2017 (Department of Basic Education, 2017).

It is equally important to note that in South Africa "out of every 100 learners that begin school in Grade One, half will drop out" (Weybright et al., 2017,p. 2). In 2011, the South African Department of Basic Education estimated a dropout rate of 6.5% among learners in Grade 9 (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Given the above, it is clear that despite support structures, learners within the schooling context still decide to leave school before completing Grade 12. Therefore, education stakeholders must determine why learners decide to leave school early.

Within the South African context, there are various factors and contextual barriers that contribute to learners' decisions to leave school. The ultimate decision to leave school can be viewed as the result of a process of gradually disengaging from school and the school environment (Archambault et al., 2009; Balfanz, Herzog, & Douglas, 2007; Branson et al., 2014; Fleisch et al., 2012; Pyle & Wexler, 2012; Weybright et al., 2017). In short, learners withdraw from school in different ways before they ultimately decide

to leave school. A gradual withdrawal from school can be seen in low academic achievement, high absenteeism rates and even behavioural misconduct (Henry et al., 2012). These factors and contextual barriers cause learner to disengage and withdraw from school.

The factors that contribute to school disengagement and school dropout can be divided into two categories, namely out-of-school factors (pull factors) and in-school factors (push factors) (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2008; Hartnack, 2017). In other words, within the South African context, there are factors within the school that 'push' learners out of school and there are factors within their community that 'pull' them out of school. These factors are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Given the above discussion, it is clear that learners within the South African context still experience significant barriers within the school and their community to access quality education. As mentioned previously, the Department of Basic Education has provided for struggling learners through legislative frameworks such as the Education White Paper 6 (2001). Within this framework, the South African government introduced the "continuum of support model" (Dreyer, 2017, p. 1). The continuum of support model addresses learners' support needs and the various push and pull factors that they experience in the schooling context.

This model strives to provide support for all learners regardless of the level of support needed. Learners with low to moderate support levels would ideally be accommodated within the mainstream context whether in a regular mainstream school or in a full-service/inclusive school (Department of Basic Education, 2001; Dreyer, 2017). Learners perceived to need a high level of support would be placed within a specific educational context such as a ‘special school’ or a ‘school of skills’ (Department of Basic Education, 2001; Dreyer, 2017).

Within this support model, the Education White Paper 6 (2001) endeavoured to assist learners by emphasising the provision of and access to educational support. Educational support or learning support can be defined as "services aimed at preventing, minimising and eradicating learning barriers and for developing conducive and supportive learning environments" (Bojuwoye et al., 2014,p. 5). Within this context, support services are mainly provided by a designated learning support

educator within the schooling context, but the services are not limited to this. For this study, learning support refers to the services that a learning support teacher provides within schools under the Western Cape Education Department.

1.1.3 Learning support teachers within the South African context

Learning support teachers are specifically tasked with providing support for learners experiencing barriers to learning. The role of these designated teachers has changed because the educational system has undergone a paradigm shift from the medical model to a more inclusive educational context and society (Dreyer, 2013). Academic intervention in the form of small group extraction of learners from the mainstream classroom remains a core function of these teachers (Dreyer, 2013; Kriel & Livingston, 2019).

Furthermore, the function of a learning support teacher is to play a more proactive role in identifying learners with barriers, to share skills and knowledge with the mainstream classroom teacher and to work collaboratively within the schooling context with all relevant role players such as parents (Dreyer, 2013). Learning support teachers provide these services through bi-weekly or tri-weekly school visits (Nel et al., 2016). In other words, learners who experience barriers to learning receive specialised intervention every week. Within these dedicated support sessions, the learning support teacher focuses on either literacy or numeracy.

It is significant to note that these support sessions are based on the learners' capabilities. The individualised nature of this type of support differs from what the mainstream teacher can provide in the classroom. In essence, the learning support teacher offers a space where all learners can experience a sense of success through academic intervention. Thus, learning support creates an opportunity for learners to improve their educational capabilities and provides a space to enhance their self-esteem (Kriel & Livingston, 2019). Due to the nature of learning support, teachers often become a haven for learners who are struggling academically and emotionally.

As mentioned above, the provision of support services is reported to have a positive influence on learner engagement (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Learning support "creates conducive learning environments, makes learners more confident and focuses on achieving" (Bojuwoye et al., 2014, p. 4). Therefore, the

provision of learning support for learners facing learning barriers may prevent them from disengaging from the schooling context and dropping out of school.

Moreover, through the provision of academic, emotional and learning support, teachers and learners can form meaningful relationships that will improve engagement behaviours in the classroom. The individualised nature of a learning support programme allows learners to perceive higher levels of teacher support, which in turn, encourages engagement in schooling (Klem & Connell, 2004).

The unique role of learning support teachers in providing both emotional and academic support in a small group context and how this support may influence school engagement behaviours has not yet been researched. These teachers play a significant role in assisting learners through small group intervention and implementing proactive intervention strategies that may lead to the prevention of learner disengagement from school.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As previously mentioned, disengagement of learners from schooling is not a single event but a process. It is essential to gain insight into the reasons for disengagement and what re-engages or motivates learners to remain in school so that the dropout rate in South African schools can significantly improve. Repeating a grade or retention within a grade should not be the primary intervention strategy to improve a struggling learner's academic performance because this creates learner disengagement. Consequently, it is essential to understand how learners are re-engaged in learning through appropriate educational intervention.

Research conducted on school engagement within South African has mainly focused on school disengagement within high schools and tertiary institutions. A few studies have been conducted on the phenomenon of school disengagement in primary schools (Witbooi, 2019) but have not investigated the construct of school engagement from an educational support point of view. This study would thus provide crucial information regarding the construct of school engagement from the viewpoint of learning support teachers attempting to prevent school disengagement.

Research conducted in the area of preventing school disengagement argues strongly for an adult to foster a meaningful relationship between the learner and the school and

to fulfil the role of mentor for the learner and help the learner deal with the emotional and psychological areas of disengagement (Pyle & Wexler, 2012; Sinclair et al., 2014). Recent research within the South African context has found that learners who attend learning support groups or remedial instruction experience a feeling of success when attending and thus develop better self-esteem (Kriel & Livingston, 2019). Therefore, the provision of academic and emotional support can be regarded as a critical area of intervention to prevent learners from disengaging from school (Pyle & Wexler, 2012).

The following primary research question thus guided the study:

What is the role of the learning support teacher in facilitating learner engagement in mainstream schools?

The secondary research question that guided the study is as follows:

What preventative measures are employed by learning support teachers to ensure learner engagement?

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore and understand the experiences of learning support teachers concerning preventative academic measures that are implemented to promote positive school engagement behaviours. Furthermore, the researcher explores the strategies and best teaching practices that the learning support teachers implement to facilitate engagement among learners who have been referred for academic support intervention.

1.4 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this research is to explore and understand the contextually based engagement strategies and preventative educational measures that learning support teachers implement in their daily practice. These strategies and best teaching practices could be shared within the specific schooling context. By sharing these preventative educational measures and contextually based engagement strategies, mainstream teachers could likewise implement the strategies and in so doing, the hope is that learners' engagement behaviours improve.

1.5 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A summary of the research methods that were employed during this study is provided in Table 1.1. In Chapter 3, a full description of the research methodology is presented.

Table 1.1: Overview of the research methods

Research Method	
Research design	A basic qualitative inquiry
Selection of participants	Purposive sampling of learning support teachers within the Central Education District in the Western Cape
Data collection methods	• Semi-structured interviews • Narrative texts • Reflective notes
Data analysis	• Thematic and inductive data analysis
Ethical considerations	• Informed consent and voluntary participation • Confidentiality • Anonymity • Maleficence
Quality criteria	Insurance of reliability and trustworthiness through the use of member checking and triangulation

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

An outline of this mini-thesis is presented in Table 1.2 (Mouton, 2007).

Table 1.2: Outline of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction	Overview of the study, research problem, research questions, purpose and importance of the study
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	An analysis of the literature relating to the research topic and the conceptual framework of the research concept
Chapter 3: Research Methodology	Presentation of the research methodology, including the research design and process
Chapter 4: Research Results , Findings and Recommendations	Data interpretation and discussion of results of the fieldwork. As well as providing recommendations for future studies.

1.7 INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND THESIS

During the process of completing this thesis, an international pandemic was declared. Due to the outbreak of a new strain of the coronavirus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome, better known as SARS, a national state of disaster was declared in South Africa. The new strain of the virus, SARS-CoV-2, caused the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19). The infection rate was so rapid that a national lockdown of the country was instated to control the spread of the virus from 27 March 2020 until the 31st of March 2020. This national lockdown involved most of the economy closing for more than three months, with only specific jobs being considered essential.

Universities and schools closed as the government tried to stop the spread of the virus; this, of course, had an enormous impact on the progress of this study. When the lockdown was announced, the researcher was still in the process of attaining ethical clearance from the university. However, an embargo was placed by the university on all in-person data collection to help stop the spread of the virus. Consequently, the researcher decided to make use of two different online platforms to accommodate future participants and thus needed to resubmit an application for ethical approval.

1.8 DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

1.8.1 Learner engagement

It is important to note that for this study, students who are attending primary and high schools within South Africa are referred to as learners. The researcher is aware that international literature refers to a student instead of a learner, but this study chose the latter term. Learner engagement can be defined as learners' levels of active participation within academic and other school-related activities and the commitment they have towards their education and learning goals (Lovelace et al., 2017). It is a multi-faceted construct with various contributing components (Lee, 2014).

1.8.2 Learner disengagement

Learner disengagement can be defined as a learner's level of disinterest or active withdrawal from school-related activities. It is a multi-faceted and complicated process that is not a single event but happens over time (Davidson et al., 2017; Finn, 1989). As with school engagement, learner disengagement is a combination of behavioural, emotional and cognitive domains (Davidson et al., 2017).

1.8.3 Educational learner support

Within the South African context, support services are provided to minimise and eradicate learning and developmental barriers to learning (Bojuwoye et al., 2014). Furthermore, these services aim to develop conducive and supportive learning environments (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

1.8.4 Learning support teacher

A learning support teacher can be described as a specialised educator who provides small-group academic interventions for learners who are experiencing barriers to learning at school level (Dreyer, 2013; Kriel & Livingston, 2019; Nel et al., 2016). Within an inclusive educational system, these specialist teachers are also responsible for guiding mainstream educators in support provision for learners in the classroom and collaborating with other educational support staff (Dreyer, 2013).

Due to the nature of the support provided by learning support teachers, learners are also able to experience a sense of success and accomplishment. The feeling of success and accomplishment consequently leads to an improvement in the learner's

self-esteem (Kriel & Livingston, 2019). Thus, within the learning support classroom, learners receive support not only in the form of academic intervention but also in the form of emotional support.

1.8.5 School dropout

Within the South African context, the term dropout refers to a learner who leaves school before the completion of a specific grade in a given year (Weybright et al., 2017).

1.9 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a broad overview of the study. Aspects discussed included the rationale for the study, the research problem, the research questions and a summary of the research methods. In this chapter, the researcher also defined essential terms for the reader. In the following chapter, the relevant and current literature relating to learner engagement is discussed.

CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the role of learning support teachers in learner engagement facilitation was introduced. In this chapter, relevant literature is reviewed and a synthesis of available information to investigate school engagement and identify possible research gaps is presented.

In the first part of this chapter, school engagement is conceptualised and thereafter, a broad overview is given of a theoretical framework from which school engagement can be examined and applied within the South African context. Furthermore, the different spheres/dimensions of school engagement and the factors contributing to school engagement are discussed. Lastly, the concept of school disengagement is considered together with the preventative models of disengagement that have been researched.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

The construct of school engagement was first introduced in the seminal text of Finn (1989) as a way in which to understand school dropout. However, due to the versatility and understandability of the construct, researchers could expand on the initial definition of the construct and the broader purpose it served within education (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lamote et al., 2013) School engagement is now also viewed as an essential construct in understanding academic underachievement.

School engagement can be defined as a ‘multi-dimensional construct’, with different components that capture aspects of behaviour, emotion and cognition within one design (Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004; Reschly et al., 2008). The construct of school engagement is malleable (Fredricks et al., 2004; Lamote et al., 2013; Reschly et al., 2008), which implies that the degree to which a learner is engaged can be modified or changed with targeted intervention.

Furthermore, it is vital that school engagement is not simply viewed as characteristic of or inherent to a specific learner(s) but rather heavily influenced by various contextual

factors and interactions with different role players (Fredricks et al., 2004; Sinclair et al., 2014). This implies that a learner's degree of engagement can change over time and is not viewed as a static characteristic embedded within the learner. Due to the malleable nature of school engagement, it is influenced by factors stemming from the different systems in which learners function and form a part such as the school, peer group or home system (Fredricks et al., 2004; Sinclair et al., 2014). Within these systems or contexts, various factors can influence the degree of school engagement.

School engagement is an essential part of understanding learner dropout from school that has evolved and serves a broader purpose in educational research. Recent research has found a clear link between engagement within the schooling context and the long-term academic achievement of a learner (Christenson et al., 2012; Lovelace et al., 2017; Skinner et al., 2009). In other words, the measurement of school engagement has been used to improve and understand learners who are struggling academically (Christenson et al., 2012; Lovelace et al., 2017). Thus, the construct can provide insight into how to assist struggling learners and ultimately to assist in improving the schooling context.

As with any research construct, different theoretical and conceptual models exist to explain the inner workings of the concept. Due to the broad understanding and application of school engagement, various models have been developed and researched. It is important to note that although much research has been completed, there is no unified conceptual model to explain the construct of school engagement. Consequently, researchers have struggled to reach consensus on a definition and which particular engagement dimensions should be included (Fredricks et al., 2004). The different conceptual models of school engagement theorists tend to differ on the inclusion or exclusion of particular dimensions of engagement.

2.3 DIFFERENT CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

The difference between the most prominent theoretical models of engagement is the number of key dimensions in the framework. Finn (1989) conceptualised a school engagement model that only accounted for affective and behavioural aspects. Researchers have expanded on these two dimensions by including two additional spheres of school engagement.

Specific conceptual models include academic, behavioural, cognitive and psychological/affective factors that are believed to influence a learner's ability to engage within the schooling context (Appleton et al., 2006, 2008a; Carter et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004). It is important to view these dimensions as an integrated whole that forms the "meta-construct" of learner engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004,p. 83).

Other researchers including Skinner and colleagues (2009) proposed two dimensions of engagement in their conceptual framework: behavioural and emotional (Christenson et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2009). These researchers also included two types of disaffection: behavioural disaffection and emotional disaffection (Christenson et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2009). For this study, school engagement is conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct that consists of four different dimensions, cognitive, academic, behavioural, and affective/psychological, which are the proposed dimensions of Skinner et al. (2009) and Christenson et al. (2012).

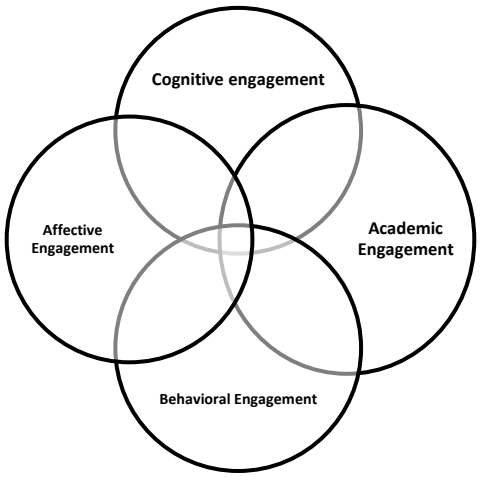

Figure 2.1: Different dimensions of school engagement

Source**:** Skinner et al. (2009) and Christenson et al. (2012).

2.3.1 Different dimensions of engagement

Although the dimensions are defined separately, they are highly interconnected, and a learner may experience a high level of engagement in one dimension while being disengaged in another (Christenson et al., 2012). The four dimensions of school

engagement can be divided into two categories: observable processes and internal processes (Christenson et al., 2012; National Research Council Institute of Medicine, 2004). According to research, behavioural and academic engagement are more observable due to the outward type of indicators that can easily be detected such as participation in school-related activities or being on time for school (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004). Conversely, the indicators of cognitive and affective engagement are more related to internal processes such as self-regulation and a sense of belonging (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004).

2.3.1.1 Academic engagement

Academic engagement refers to indicators such as performance in school and homework and assignment completion (Appleton et al., 2006; Reschly et al., 2008). In other words, academic engagement can be described as how much time learners spend on school-related activities and the success they achieve within the schooling system in relation to their grades (Christenson et al., 2012; O'Toole & Due, 2015).

2.3.1.2 Behavioural engagement

Learners' behavioural engagement is indicated by school attendance, behaviour within the schooling context and overall participation in schooling activities such as extra-mural activities (Appleton et al., 2006; Reschly et al., 2008). Thus, the level of this type of engagement is indicated by the learner's level of involvement in school-related activities both in the classroom and during extra-curricular activities (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004).

2.3.1.3 Cognitive engagement

Cognitive engagement is described as a "learner's investment in learning" (Carter et al., 2012, p. 62). It includes internal processes such as self-regulation, metacognitive thinking strategies and academic knowledge (Appleton et al., 2006; Carter et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004). Learners who are cognitively engaged in schooling would thus strive to achieve more than what is expected of them and attempt to master the skills needed to succeed in the schooling context (Carter et al., 2012).

2.3.1.4 Psychological engagement

Psychological engagement consists of internal indicators such as a learner's sense of belonging in relation to the school and peers and is inclusive of the learner's affective reactions towards the schooling context (Carter et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2004; Greene, 2015). Within this dimension, the teacher-learner relationship is brought to the fore. Studies have found that learners who perceive their teachers to be caring and supportive and interested in their learning and emotional well-being are less likely to drop out of school (Fredricks et al., 2004).

It is clear from the discussion above that the construct of school engagement has undergone significant changes in how it is understood and used within the schooling context. In the following section of the literature review, the different dimensions of school engagement are discussed.

2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

As mentioned in the previous section, school engagement as a construct is significantly influenced by various contextual factors and engagement levels depending on the interactions that learners have with their immediate environments (Yusof et al., 2018). Furlong et al. (2003) identified four primary environments in which school engagement is influenced: the student, classroom, school environment and peers. These various contexts interact and shape the development of school engagement (Roundfield et al., 2018). Thus, it is essential to view school engagement from an ecological systems theory perspective so that the complexities of reciprocal interactions and the influences of different contextual factors can be considered.

However, the ecological systems theory alone cannot encapsulate or explain the underlying factors that influence or shape school engagement of learners. Therefore, it is proposed that both the self-system model of motivational development and ecological systems theory be kept in mind when attempting to understand student engagement. It is suggested that contextual factors, reciprocal interactions, and factors within the learner influence and shape the level of school engagement that is displayed or experienced.

The self-system model of motivational development is grounded within the self-determination theory (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). This

model integrates the contextual factors and self-system processes that can influence a learner's engagement level (Christenson et al., 2012; Fall & Roberts, 2012). Furthermore, the model asserts that human beings have an innate psychological need for relatedness, competence and autonomy (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fall & Roberts, 2012). If the social context within which an individual is functioning can satisfy these needs, the individual will be suitably engaged (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fall & Roberts, 2012).

In other words, it is vital to view a learner's level of school engagement through the ecological systems theory and the self-system process model to understand the complexities of the construct. The ecological systems theory allows one to consider the complexities of the contexts and the environments in which students function and how these can affect school engagement. The theory also highlights the importance of reciprocal interactions and how they can be a catalyst for a change in school engagement level. The self-system models highlight the internal psychological needs of learners that must be satisfied for engagement to be successful and sustained in the schooling context. By using both these approaches, one can view school engagement holistically.

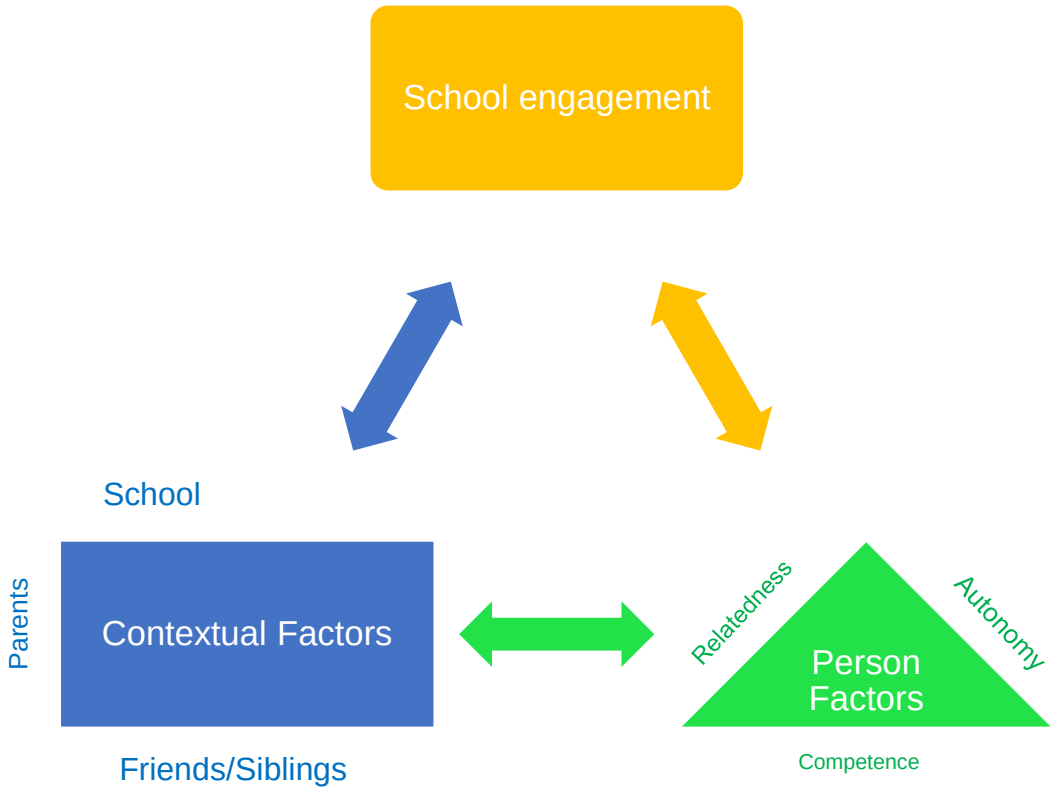

Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework of school engagement

Source: Own conceptual framework

Figure 2.2 is a proposed visual representation of the conceptual framework of theories for this thesis. It posits that school engagement behaviours are influenced by both contextual factors and personal factors. The personal factors relate to the learners' psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy while the contextual factors refer to the various environments within which they function. In the following section, both theories are explored in more detail and applied to the construct of engagement.

As set out in Figure 2.3, the degree of school engagement that learners experience is influenced reciprocally by their interactions with various contexts or environments.

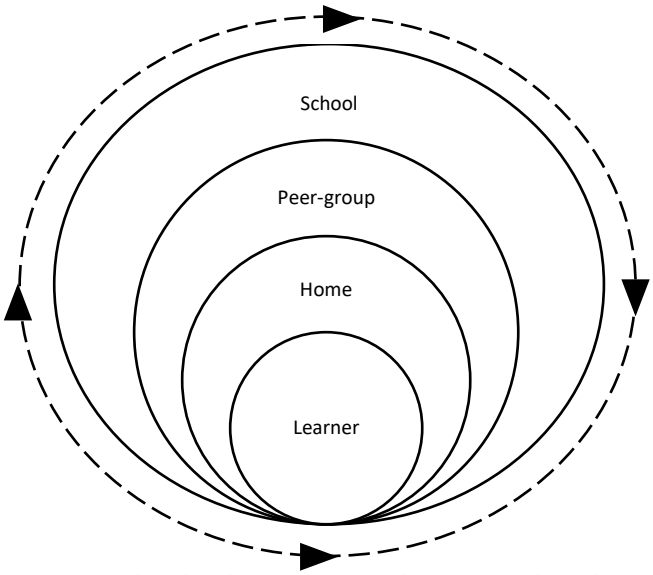

Figure 2.3: Ecological systems view of school engagement

Source: Adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development 1998

2.4.1 Defining the ecological systems theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner proposed in 1998 the modern version of the Ecological Model of Human Development, which has undergone a process of development during its life cycle. This human development model is based on a multi-dimensional approach to how humans develop within multiple systems and contexts through reciprocal interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2015; Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). These systems are situated at different levels within the child's context and consistently influence one another (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). In other words, humans are seen as active participants within their development and context (Shelton, 2009).

It is essential to understand the "four dynamic and interacting dimensions" (Swart & Pettipher, 2016,p.12) that contribute towards this human development model. These four dimensions are "proximal processes, person characteristics, systems/context and time" (Swart & Pettipher, 2016,p. 12). Therefore, human development occurs when an individual is involved in proximal processes that are consequently influenced by the individual's characteristics, context and time.

The first of these dimensions, namely proximal processes, takes place within a specific context or system. Proximal processes or the reciprocal interactions occur within the

microsystem, and these processes are seen as the driving forces behind the development and growth of humans (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Elliott & Tudge, 2007; Trudge et al., 2009). For optimal development to occur, the reciprocal interactions must be consistent over an extended amount of time (Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2015; Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). As the person develops and matures over time, these interactions become more intricate (Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2015; Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). Furthermore, throughout this development process, the individual is not a bystander but an active contributor (Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2015).

The second dimension that influences individuals' development is their "personal characteristics" or "biopsychosocial characteristics" (Swart & Pettipher, 2016, p 13). Simply stated, biopsychosocial characteristics allude to aspects of a developing person that are inherent in his/her biological makeup. The ecological systems model discusses three specific characteristics of a developing person: demand, resource, and force (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). Demand characteristics allude to the aspects of a developing person that elicit an immediate reaction or stimulus from another person (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009) such as gender or physical appearance.

Resource characteristics are not immediately seen by other people (Trudge et al., 2009). They entail "emotional and mental resources" (Trudge et al., 2009, p. 200) that a developing person has accumulated through past experiences and interactions with the systems and key role players. The last personal characteristic of the development model is force. This refers to a developing person's inherent characteristics concerning personality such as temperament and motivation (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

The third dimension in which development takes place is the context or system. Bronfenbrenner conceptualised the context within his model as the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem (Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2015; Lee et al., 2010; Overstreet & Mazza, 2003; Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). The microsystem can be described as the system closest to the developing person (Overstreet & Mazza, 2003). This system is the immediate environment or context within which the developing person is situated (Elliott & Tudge, 2007; Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

According to Overstreet and Mazza (2003), the exosystem can be described as the community within which the developing person resides. Although the developing person does not actively participate in the exosystem, this system still influences the child's development (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). The penultimate system that influences development is the macrosystem. This system is the farthest removed from the developing person and includes society's "cultural values and beliefs" (Overstreet & Mazza, 2003, p. 67). The last system in the ecological model, namely the chronosystem, represents the importance that time plays within the development of humans (Swart & Pettipher, 2016; Trudge et al., 2009). This system refers specifically to how time influences the interactions between systems and within each system (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development considers the complex and multi-dimensional aspects that contribute to the optimal development of a person. This model provides a framework to investigate systematically the complexities of school engagement development and the problems that may contribute towards a learner not developing the optimal level of school engagement.

2.4.2 School engagement and the ecological systems theory

By viewing school engagement through the lens of the ecological model, one can consider the complexities regarding the influence of various factors on this construct. A learner within the schooling system is continually being influenced by multiple elements within their home, peer and school systems or in other words, their micro-systems. Within these systems, the proximal processes or interactions change their engagement level within the schooling context.

In the context of the learner's home, the level of support offered in academic motivation/support and parental practices influences the school engagement level (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2014). In other words, learners' school experiences in general are influenced by their parents' interest and the motivation they receive from home to participate and complete school. The proximal interactions between parents and learners ultimately play a role in the learners' level of school engagement as parents impart essential school completion and participation skills (Christenson et al., 2012; Yusof et al., 2018). Parents need to teach or model the skills that are required for school completion such as intrinsic

motivation and how to deal with challenges (Christenson et al., 2012). Furthermore, parents play a vital role in the learner's level of school engagement through their engagement in the schooling context, for example, by attending school activities (Bowen & Brewster, 2004).

Another significant proximal interaction or process that influences school engagement is found within the school context. In accordance with the ecological systems model, the school is also situated within the learner's microsystem. Research has found that the teacher-learner relationship significantly influences school engagement levels. A supportive, warm and fair relationship between learner and teacher can mediate changes in the level of school engagement and improve a learner's overall performance at school (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2011). A more in-depth discussion regarding the importance of the teacher-learner relationship follows later in this chapter.

Within the schooling context, a learner's degree of school engagement is influenced by school policies, rules and practices (Furlong et al., 2003). In other words, the school's culture and climate ultimately affect how well a learner is able to engage within the schooling context, for example, the intervention strategies that a school has in place for learners deemed to be at risk academically or the psychological services available for learners with emotional difficulties.

When considering the concept of school engagement ecologically, a learner's school engagement behaviours are further influenced by their peer relationships, which are also seen as proximal processes. Research has found that positive peer relationships positively influence a learner's school engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2011; Furlong et al., 2003; Roundfield et al., 2018; Yusof et al., 2018). Through positive social practices with peers, a learner's degree of school engagement can increase. For example, learners encouraging one another in peer-learning groups or sharing information positively influences school engagement (Fredricks, 2011).

Lastly, learners' school engagement behaviour is influenced by their biopsychosocial characteristics (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Individual characteristics such as gender and self-concept influence learners' ability to engage in schooling (Quin et al., 2018). Research has found that males are more likely to disengage from schooling and to drop out (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). This implies that teachers and schools

should target their early intervention strategies more towards male learners since males seem to be more at risk of disengagement and ultimately, of dropping out.

In addition, a learner's force characteristics must be considered when examining school engagement. As mentioned above, force characteristics refer to a learner's inherent characteristics such as personality, temperament and motivation. Within the current conceptual model for this study, a learner's inherent ability to be motivated is interesting. The self-system model of motivational development posits that learners would ultimately motivate themselves if their basic psychological needs are met. In essence, when inspecting school engagement behaviours and specifically the impact of the learner's force characteristics on school engagement, the learner's basic psychological needs should also be taken into account.

By viewing the construct of school engagement through ecological systems, the complexities of the various factors that influence school engagement are highlighted. In the following section, the self-system model is discussed and the impact it has on the construct of school engagement is investigated.

2.4.3 Self-system model of motivational development

As defined by Connell and Wellborn (1991), the self-system model is based on four defining features. The first defining feature states that all humans have an innate need for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Turner et al., 2014). When these needs are suitably satisfied, the person is able to engage within an educational context.

The second feature is that the self-system processes develop through interaction with the social context and psychological needs (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The third defining feature of this model is that the degree to which the particular social context meets the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence is based on the provision of structure, support for independence and involvement (Christenson et al., 2012; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Fall & Roberts, 2012). In other words, the social context should provide a person with structure and support to develop autonomy and allow for involvement. If the crucial role players within the social context can provide this for the person, self-system processes can develop and the psychological needs will be met.

The last defining feature is that individual differences within humans and their self-system processes produce differences in the actions that they take (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). In other words, the cultural context of a person will influence the actions taken and whether the person is actively engaged in the context or disaffected.

In developing self-systems, the individual is an active partner (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The self-system is an evaluation method whereby individuals evaluate their status within a given context in terms of whether their three basic psychological needs have been met (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). These basic psychological needs are the "organismic proprieties" used to organise the self-system (Connell & Wellborn, 1991 ,p.51). It is important to note that the self-systems or the views of themselves that humans construct are not fleeting but durable self-perceptions that guide decision-making and create the 'reality' within which they function (Christenson et al., 2012).

2.4.3.1 Psychological needs: Relatedness, competence and autonomy

The need for relatedness can be described as the need to belong within a given context (Christenson et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2014). Simply stated, a human being needs to feel connected to other humans. Furthermore, relatedness is the sense that a human is worthy of being loved, respected and included within social contexts (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

The need for competence is seen as the need for humans to view themselves as accomplished and to produce a preferred outcome and avoid negative consequences (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). In other words, it is the need to be effective in interactions within the social and physical context (Christenson et al., 2012). The need for competence has been linked with the perception of control over one's life (Christenson et al., 2012).

The last psychological need is the need for autonomy. This need refers to humans' ability to express their authentic self within the social and physical context (Christenson et al., 2012). Expressing one’s authentic self creates the ability to communicate a choice in terms of the beginning or end of activities (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). The following section discusses the self-system model of motivational development in school engagement.

2.4.4 Self-system model of motivational development and school engagement

As mentioned previously, the self-system model of motivational development demonstrates that engagement in school is dependent on the ability of the school context to meet the learner's psychological needs. Stated differently: Is the school able to meet the learner's need for relatedness, competence and autonomy? If the school can do so, the learner will be suitably engaged and develop effective coping strategies to cultivate intrinsic motivation and build resilience (Wang & Fredricks, 2014).

By meeting these basic psychological needs, engagement in school is cultivated. However, learners are also empowered by creating a motivational context (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Such a motivational context (school) allows learners to develop coping skills and strategies that ultimately enable them to re-engage (in schooling) when confronted with difficulties (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Thus, the school creates a pathway for a learner to become more motivated through the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs.

Within the schooling, social and home contexts, various role players shape learner engagement and ultimately enable a learner to meet their psychological needs. Teachers, peers and parents thus act as essential catalysts in shaping learner engagement (Christenson et al., 2012; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Wang & Fredricks, 2014).

For this particular study, interest is paid to how teachers, specifically learning support teachers, shape engagement within the schooling context. The association between school engagement and the learner-teacher relationship is discussed in Section 2.5. The discussion regarding how parents and peers influence and develop school engagement was provided in the previous chapter.

2.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIP FOR SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Extensive international research has found that the teacher-learner relationship is an essential catalyst for either higher or lower engagement behaviours in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2004; Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2011; Furlong et al., 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Pyle & Wexler, 2012) . Although learning support teachers do not spend the same number of hours with learners during the day due to the specific nature of the academic and emotional support that is

provided, a meaningful relationship tends to form. Based on the formation of a meaningful relationship between the teacher and the learner, the researcher argues that learning support teachers fulfil the same role as that within the teacher-learner relationship.

As mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, school engagement is greatly influenced by various contexts and the factors within those contexts. Research has found that a positive teacher-learner relationship is a significant predictor of positive school engagement (Amemiya et al., 2019; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). This positive correlation emphasises that teachers play a prominent role in learners' engagement behaviours.

Research has further shown that learners who perceive their teacher to be supportive and interested in their progress are more likely to achieve better academic results and be actively engaged in multiple dimensions of school engagement (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Bowen and Brewster (2004) define teacher support as "the degree to which teachers listen to, encourage, and respect students" (p. 51). In other words, learners need to feel that their teachers care about their well-being on both an academic level and an emotional level.

In addition, a positive and supportive teacher-learner relationship significantly affects peer relationships (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2014). Learners within a supportive classroom experience a higher level of acceptance among their peers and can create better and more positive relationships (Christenson et al., 2012). A supportive teacher enables learners to cultivate other positive relationships that can ultimately influence their school engagement positively.

A study conducted in South Africa on school engagement among male street children found that the learner-teacher relationship was one of the most important contributing factors for keeping these children in school (Malindi & Machenjedze, 2012). A positive teacher relationship cultivated a feeling of belonging that in turn, developed the learners' self-confidence and improved their scholastic performance (Malindi & Machenjedze, 2012). The learner-teacher relationship thus became the vehicle through which the learners’ basic psychological needs for relatedness were satisfied. This relationship between learner and teacher also became a protective factor for

these children living on the street and exposed them to positive role models (Malindi & Machenjedze, 2012).

From the discussion above, it is clear that teachers are essential in creating opportunities for learners to become more engaged in schooling. An essential process in creating these opportunities is for the teacher to build a strong relationship with the learners (Anderson et al., 2004; Fredricks, 2011). The process of relationship-building with learners includes creating opportunities for learners to develop a sense of relatedness, autonomy and competence in the schooling context. These basic psychological needs of learners can be met by implementing specific instructional strategies (Turner et al., 2014).

2.5.1 Instructional practices that enhance school engagement

For a teacher to be perceived as supportive on both an academic and an emotional level, a classroom climate of fairness, warmth and closeness needs to be cultivated through the encouragement of mutual respect (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Fredricks, 2011). A teacher should thus spend time building and cultivating meaningful relationships with learners. By cultivating a meaningful relationship and a classroom climate of respect and fairness, a teacher would undoubtedly start satisfying learners' basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence. Through actively satisfying these needs, learners would be more inclined to show active engagement behaviours.

Teachers can create a sense of fairness in the classroom by using a fair and effective behaviour management system (Christenson et al., 2012) that focuses on positive discipline measures rather than punitive measures with the intent to punish. By creating a discipline system that is based on the use of intrinsic motivation rather than a reward-punishment system, a teacher will develop a learner's sense of autonomy in the classroom (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Furthermore, to improve school engagement behaviours by building strong teacher-learner relationships, a teacher needs to personalise the educational environment (Klem & Connell, 2004; Turner et al., 2014). A personalised education environment can be achieved by providing individualised academic support (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). This entails a teacher implementing teaching strategies such as scaffolding, peer-learning groups, explicit teaching, small group intervention and

providing learners with multiple opportunities to show their knowledge and insight (Fredricks, 2011; Pyle & Wexler, 2012).

Through the implementation and use of peer-learning groups, a teacher will also create the opportunity for a learner to feel a sense of relatedness (Fredricks et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2014). Group work in the classroom allows learners to build relationships with one another and engage more meaningfully with the provided content. Furthermore, it creates the chance for teachers to role-model and teaches learners how to work effectively together in a group.

Moreover, a teacher can improve school engagement by using exciting and relevant content that connects with the learner's frame of reference (Fredricks, 2011). By selecting and teaching content that is relevant to the learners demonstrates to the learners that their perspectives and insights into specifics topics are valued (Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2011). Furthermore, a teacher needs to have high expectations for all learners in the class and to select and set challenging activities for all learners (Fredricks, 2011).

Creating a classroom context in which every learner can experience a sense of success will allow the learners to feel competent. School is the original context in which learners can develop competence (Turner et al., 2014). Part of having high expectations for all learners is that teachers communicate these expectations regularly in order for the learners to have a clear understanding of what is expected. Learners thus learn how to achieve scholastic success and to determine what is expected of them (Fredricks et al., 2019).

From the discussion above and the information provided in Chapter 1 regarding the function of a learning support teacher, it is feasible to argue that the classroom practices mentioned will be implemented in a learning support classroom. Due to smaller classroom sizes and the individualised nature of learning support, a learner will feel more supported and included. Furthermore, within the learning support classroom, the provided academic intervention can be tailored to individual interests and ability level, which is not always possible in the South African mainstream classrooms. In many mainstream classrooms, the teacher-learner ratio exceeds the recommended ratio of 40:1 (Marais, 2016).

In overcrowded mainstream classrooms, many South African teachers resort to a talk-and-chalk method to encourage active engagement in the classroom (Marais, 2016). Through this method, the curriculum design follows a one-size-fits-all approach, with little or no opportunity to fulfil a learner's basic psychological needs or to offer appropriate academic support. Overcrowded classrooms and subpar teaching methods can thus result in learners becoming less engaged in the classroom. However, within the South African context, various other factors also contribute to learners becoming disengaged.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are various push and pull factors within the South African context that may contribute to learners becoming less engaged. Although the ideal is that all learners are actively engaged in schooling, this is not the case in most South African schools, as indicated by the high dropout rate. For this study, it was thus vital to outline and conceptualise school disengagement. The following section discusses disengagement together with the various risk factors and early intervention programmes that were researched.

2.6 CONCEPTUALISING DISENGAGEMENT FROM SCHOOLING

Disengagement from schooling and the eventual consequence of dropping out of school is seen as a gradual process and not a single event (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Finn, 1989; Pyle & Wexler, 2012; Sinclair et al., 1998; Weybright et al., 2017). Withdrawing from school is far more complicated than "disengaged behaviours" (Davidson et al., 2017, p. 34) that are inherent to the learner due to his/her negative attitude towards the schooling context. Instead, disengagement, similar to its counterpart engagement, is a "state of being that is highly influenced by contextual factors" (Sinclair et al., 2014, p. 31). Since the construct is highly influenceable, one can argue that it is thus malleable, similar to school engagement.

As with the construct of engagement, school disengagement consists of different dimensions that interact with one another (Davidson et al., 2017; Trowler, 2010). Brint and Cantwell (2014) proposed five different dimensions of disengagement, namely values, motivation, study behaviours, academic interactions and competing involvements. Similar to engagement, a learner can be disengaged in one or all dimensions. The malleable nature implies that learners can become more engaged in

one or more dimensions even if they are gradually withdrawing from schooling (Brint & Cantwell, 2014).

Thus, it is necessary for educational stakeholders to be aware of learners who are at risk of becoming disengaged or withdrawing from school so that early intervention can be planned. Within the South African context, two significant factors influence learners' ability to engage in schooling, namely pull and push factors. As explained in the previous chapter, pull factors refer to factors outside the school, pulling learners out of the school system. In contrast, push factors are factors that are located within the schooling system and that force learners to leave school. These factors were briefly discussed in Chapter 1 but are now outlined in detail.

2.6.1 The South African context and learner disengagement

Within the South African context, the 'pull' factors for most learners are centred around socio-economic factors. Although researchers have found that poverty can play a role in the decision to leave school early, it is not the only risk factor related to the socio-economic status of a learner (Branson et al., 2014; Fleisch et al., 2012). Research has found that most learners of school going age are being enrolled in schools despite high poverty levels (Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2009; Fleisch et al., 2012; Gustafsson, 2011). The reasons for leaving school are thus more complex and multi-dimensional than simply poverty.

Pull factors within the learner's community can also cause school dropout. A high unemployment rate within a community can cause learners, parents and community members to lose faith in the need for education, specifically matriculation (matric), to gain promising employment opportunities (Hartnack, 2017). Peer-pressure, gang affiliation and the use of illegal drugs have also been found to be pull factors within the context of South Africa (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2011; Hartnack, 2017). Unfortunately, these factors are more prominent in low socio-economic communities and place learners at risk even if their basic needs are being met.

Learners are also at risk of leaving school early due to child-headed households or the need to provide for their family due to illnesses such as HIV and AIDS (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2008; Hartnack, 2017). These learners seek employment before entering Grade 12 so that they can provide for their families.

Furthermore, research has found that factors such as family structure, teenage pregnancy and orphan-hood are all risk factors for leaving school early (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2008; Gustafsson, 2011; Hartnack, 2017).

The push factors that learners encounter within the schooling context relate to the school environment and the quality of curriculum delivery. Unfortunately, quality education in South Africa is tied to socio-economic status (Branson et al., 2014; Dieltiens & Meny-Gilbert, 2009; Hartnack, 2017). Poor, marginalised learners receive inferior curriculum delivery due to oversized classes, under-resourced classrooms, ill-equipped teachers and subordinate school management (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2017; Fleisch et al., 2012; Gustafsson, 2011; Hartnack, 2017). All these factors individually cause learners to fall behind academically and ultimately, to become disengaged.

It is important to note that many South African learners attend school outside their communities, contributing to disengaged learners. Fataar (2012) argues that disadvantaged learners attend schools outside their residential communities where their culture background does not match the culture being cultivated at the school. This cultural mismatch leads to “the lack of a pedagogical reception for these students’ cultural and educational backgrounds” (Fataar, 2012, p. 55). In other words, the learners’ wealth of knowledge that has been accumulated throughout their lives through lived experiences within their communities is not taken into account as valuable knowledge to extend upon while teaching. This cultural capital is set aside and in turn, learners are ‘pushed’ out of school. Fataar (2012) further argues that schools should “focus on a pedagogical engagement platform that connects school-based learning with students’ own life-world experiences” (Fataar, 2012, p. 55).

Another significant push factor within the South African schooling context is the high grade retainment rate and the correlation between grade repetition and eventually leaving school or dropping out (Branson et al., 2014; Motala et al., 2009). Learners who fall behind academically and are retained within a grade as an attempt to intervene demonstrate a significantly higher rate of dropping out of school (Hartnack, 2017; Motala et al., 2009). Retention rates within a grade and learner dropout significantly increase from Grade 7 onwards (Branson et al., 2014). It has been demonstrated that 52% of learners in Grade 10 to Grade 12 have repeated a grade in

their schooling career (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Weybright et al., 2017). The report on the Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System of the Department of Basic Education indicated that grade repetition is a strong predictor of learner disengagement and eventual dropout (Department of Basic Education, 2011).

From the discussion above, it is clear that learners in the South African context are at risk of dropping out of school early due to academic underachievement and grade retention. A way to understand the impact of low academic achievement on a learner's ultimate decision to leave school is through the proposed 'frustration/self-esteem' model of Finn (1989). The author proposed that learners disengage from school due to school failure and possible undiagnosed learning problems, leading to low self-esteem and eventually school dropout (Finn, 1989). Furthermore, he argues that consistent academic underperformance significantly influences the learners' view of themselves. Thus, these learners seek activities to experience a measure of success or acceptance (Finn, 1989). Learners who often experience academic underperformance may express their frustrations through unacceptable behaviour within the schooling context (Finn, 1989).

Low academic achievement could thus be an early warning sign of a learner becoming disengaged. School stakeholders must be aware of such early warning signs of school disengagement to prevent early school dropout. In the following section, risk factors and indicators of school disengagement are discussed.

2.6.2 Risk factors and indicators of school disengagement

As previously discussed in this chapter, disengagement from school is seen as a gradual process that ultimately leads to dropping out of school altogether. Policymakers and government need to provide early interventions for schools to reduce the rate of learners dropping out of school, and prevention programmes should be formulated based on identifying certain risk factors.

As with the construct of engagement in schooling, school disengagement is also influenced by multiple factors across various contexts. These multiple factors and diverse contexts refer back to the conceptual model proposed in this thesis. In other words, policymakers and government must not consider risk factors or school disengagement indicators in isolation but must closely examine the various systems

in which the learner functions, for instance, the family system, school or even the broader community. To intervene holistically, attention should also be paid to the significant role players within these systems or the proximal processes in which the learners engage.

Researchers concerned with school disengagement and eventual dropout have identified two broad categories of risk factors, namely social and academic (Lee & Burkam, 2003). These two categories coincide with findings in the South African context regarding learners' reasons for leaving school early. Social risk factors are found within the community and comprise some of the pull factors located outside the school. Academic risk factors are push factors found within the schooling system that are placing the learner at risk of becoming disengaged and eventually dropping out.

Academic risk factors refer to a learner's school behaviour and performance and the structure of the school (Christenson et al., 2012; Lee & Burkam, 2003). Conversely, social risk factors include individual factors such as the learner's age, race/ethnicity and gender in addition to broader factors such as family income or socio-economic status, parent's level of education and the family structure (Christenson et al., 2012; Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Another academic factor that could possibly indicate that a learner is at risk of becoming disengaged from school is absenteeism (Balfanz, Herzog, & Douglas, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012; McDermott et al., 2018; O'Toole & Due, 2015). Learners who are at risk of becoming disengaged and eventually drop out tend to be regularly absent from school. Hence, schools should monitor the school attendance of all learners, especially learners who appear to have other risk factors such as demonstrating academic underachievement, being retained within a grade or failing a course (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012; McDermott et al., 2018; O'Toole & Due, 2015).

As mentioned above, course failure and specifically grade retention within the South African context strongly correlate with dropping out of school early (Department of Basic Education, 2008, 2011). Learners who are underachieving academically or are experiencing barriers to learning require help to prevent them from dropping out of school. Furthermore, the basic psychological need for competence of learners who are consistently underachieving will not be met by the schooling environment, as

argued by the self-system model of motivational development (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Klem & Connell, 2004). Such learners will feel defeated and may develop low self-esteem or their self-confidence may be negatively affected. The influence on a learner's self-esteem and self-confidence can ultimately lead to a sense of frustration, as explained by Finn's (1989) model in the previous section. In addition, a sense of frustration can often lead to a learner misbehaving at school (Finn, 1989).

Learner misbehaviour is another possible indication of school disengagement since learners seek attention and the approval of peers and possibly a sense of relatedness (Balfanz, Herzog, & Douglas, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012; McDermott et al., 2018; O'Toole & Due, 2015). Research has found that learners who misbehave in schools and are suspended regularly are more likely to drop out of school before graduation (Balfanz, Herzog, & Douglas, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012). In other words, learners who are regularly absent, who underachieve at school and who show signs of school misbehaviour could be at risk of disengaging from schooling.

Although these academic factors can indicate that a learner is at risk of disengaging, certain factors within the schooling context can also cause a learner to disengage from school. These factors include the learner composition, the school structure and the resources available in the school (Christenson et al., 2012; Lee & Burkam, 2003). For example, the school structure can influence the level of school engagement through the average socio-economic status of the learners attending the school (Christenson et al., 2012; Lee & Burkam, 2003). If a large percentage of learners attending the school fall within a low socio-economic status, the portion of possible at-risk learners is higher, which influences the school's overall level of engagement.

Another way the school structure can influence learners' engagement behaviours is through the class sizes, the school's location and the type of school (Christenson et al., 2012). For instance, it will be challenging for a teacher in a classroom with 50 learners to implement many of the discussed classroom practices that enhance school engagement behaviours. It would also be significantly more complex to provide a more individualised curriculum or provide adequate support for all the learners. In addition, within a state-funded school, the resources are less than in a privately owned and funded school. The availability of resources such as academic support or adequate

referral systems for intervention can influence the state of school engagement in a school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the location of the school can influence school engagement behaviours. Schools that are located far from urban cities may not be as well-resourced as schools situated in the suburbs, specifically within the South African context where many rural schools still lack basic amenities such as running water and flushing toilets. A learner's school engagement can also be influenced by a learner's need to travel a far distance to attend school; weather and financial factors can prevent school attendance. In other words, academic risk factors and social risk factors can overlap and influence a learner's ability to engage actively in the schooling context and cause systematic disengagement.

Social risk factors such as the parent-child relationship are considered predictors of school dropout (McDermott et al., 2018). Parents who have high expectations for their children and are involved in their schooling heighten school engagement whereas parents who are disinterested in their child's progress or expect failure exacerbate disengagement from schooling (Christenson et al., 2012). For example, parents interested in their child's progress at school will encourage good habits such as completing homework and submitting assignments. Conversely, disinterested parents may inadvertently encourage disengagement from schooling by not prioritising schooling in the home.

If the education stakeholders can identify early indicators and risk factors of learners becoming disengaged from schooling, it would be possible to prevent eventual dropout. Various prevention programmes have been researched and introduced throughout the world with great success, particularly within the United States of America. In the following section, general strategies to develop prevention models for school disengagement are discussed together with tried and proven prevention models.

2.7 PREVENTING LEARNER DISENGAGEMENT

Preventing learners from disengaging from school and finishing their formal schooling career should be viewed from a multi-dimensional perspective (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Prevention and intervention models designed for counteracting learner dropout are diverse. In other words, prevention programmes should not only target the area of

concern but should also investigate the possible risk factors holistically. If a learner is demonstrating academic and social risk factors, intervention programmes should target both the school context and the home context. Therefore, intervention and prevention programmes should be comprehensive and include both family and community structures (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Pyle and Wexler (2012) suggest that a prevention programme should be a threefold process. Firstly, a diagnostic process encompassing a whole-school approach should be undertaken within a school to identify individual learner drop-out problems (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Secondly, targeted interventions should address specific issues relating to learner disengagement in learners identified as being at risk through early identification (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Lastly, a school wide prevention programme should be implemented to promote and enhance learner engagement across the school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Pyle & Wexler, 2012).

Furthermore, academic intervention is proposed to re-engage learners displaying early signs of disengagement from learning. Academic support would entail implementing the curriculum in a versatile way, ensuring that assessments allow learners to demonstrate their knowledge in diverse forms and incorporating different learning and teaching styles within the classroom (Christenson et al., 2012; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Part of this prevention strategy would be to engage with learners within a smaller group context, to individualise teaching and to work with learners' capabilities rather than concentrating on their deficits (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Pyle & Wexler, 2012).

Another aspect of school disengagement that could be addressed through a prevention programme is behavioural support. Behavioural support refers to teachers modelling acceptable behaviour for learners and equipping them with the necessary skills to manage social situations (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Schools should make use of positive behaviour measures and instil the values of restorative discipline practices.

A proven and researched prevention programme for learner disengagement and school dropout is the Check and Connect programme. Check and Connect is a model that promotes learner engagement within a schooling context (Sinclair et al., 2014). It is described as a "highly targeted and individualised approach involving identification,

treatment, and skill-building" (Sinclair et al., 2014, p. 31). Within this model, a learner is assigned a designated facilitator who is responsible for developing the learner's connection within the schooling context and subsequently, the connection with learning (Sinclair et al., 2014).

As mentioned earlier, the programme is highly individualised, with the facilitator monitoring risky behaviours or indicators such as absenteeism to guide the type of intervention that is required (Sinclair et al., 2014). Intervention is based on checking the learner's progress in targeted areas and communicating this progress (good or bad) to all relevant role players such as parents/guardians and teachers (Sinclair et al., 2014). In other words, this programme aims to provide learners with the necessary skills to re-engage in the schooling context and to build a robust support network.

Given the above discussion, it is clear that learner disengagement is as complex as its counterpart, school engagement. Therefore, policymakers and education stakeholders need to consider both these constructs to ensure that learners stay actively engaged in school, and when they are at risk of becoming disengaged, attention is paid to ensure that they are re-engaged.

2.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the literature relevant to the construct of engagement was examined. The construct of engagement was conceptualised through a multi-dimensional perspective by examining the different dimensions of school engagement. It was also essential for the reader to gain insight into the importance of the teacher-learner relationship and possible classroom practices that positively influence school engagement behaviours.

Furthermore, the ecological model and the self-systems model of motivational development were used to understand the contextual influences and interactions that ultimately shape a learner's school engagement. It was determined that the researcher must consider the reciprocal interaction between the learner and the learning support teacher while being mindful of the ability of the learning support teacher to satisfy the learner’s basic psychological needs. Research should also include the teaching practices of learning support teachers and how they can meet these psychological needs by creating the correct classroom context.

Unfortunately, within the South African context and abroad, the reality remains that various factors cause learners to become disengaged in the schooling context. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the meaning of disengagement, the possible risk factors and the indicators of school disengagement and ultimately, to understand how disengagement can be prevented.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and the methodology of the mini dissertation. In the first section of the chapter, the research paradigm and design are discussed. Thereafter, the selection of the site and the participants is outlined. The employed data collection methods are then explained together with the quality measures regarding the research process. Finally, the ethical considerations and issues considered during the research process are provided.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM AND DESIGN

3.2.1 Introduction

A basic qualitative research design grounded within the social constructivist paradigm or worldview was conducted (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process of inquiry was aligned with qualitative research and relied on qualitative methods of data gathering. In this section, the research paradigm and research design are discussed.

3.2.2 Paradigm

A paradigm can be described as a frame of reference from which a shared view is generated in relation to values and beliefs (Kawulich, 2015). It is the philosophical underpinning of how the researcher engages with knowledge and what will primarily be viewed as the 'truth' (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). In other words, a paradigm provides the researcher with a framework or a worldview from which to approach the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2000).

The framework or worldview is defined by three dimensions, namely the ontology, epistemology and methodology. The dimension of ontology is primarily concerned with the 'nature of reality' (Kawulich, 2015; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999), in other words, with what will be accepted as the 'truth' and what can be considered as real. Furthermore, the epistemology of a paradigm sets out to define "what is considered to be knowledge" (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015, p. 60). This dimension deals with how knowledge is produced, who produces the knowledge and what is to

be regarded as relevant sources of knowledge. Lastly, the methodology is concerned with how the research will be conducted in relation to the research design and the methods used to capture data. The methodology of this study is discussed later in this chapter.

As mentioned above, this study is rooted in the social constructivist research paradigm. In the social constructivist paradigm, the ontology or the reality is believed to be socially constructed, and there is no one actual 'reality' but multiple realities. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kawulich, 2015; Patton, 2002). These socially constructed realities are thus highly contextualised and can only speak to the perceptions of the reality of the researched population. This paradigm is best suited for this study because the participants' lived experiences are dependent on the diverse contexts in which they are teaching. In other words, the lived experiences of the participants regarding disengaged learners and the strategies of how to re-engage learners will differ from the experiences and strategies of learning support teachers from other schools, communities/cities or provinces in South Africa. Their 'reality' or 'truth' would only apply to the specific context in which it was socially constructed.

The epistemology or the nature of knowledge within this paradigm is subjective and transactional (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 2002). Knowledge is socially constructed through interaction with the world and other social groups (Kawulich, 2015; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). The researcher and the research participants' transactional communication "literally create" the knowledge or findings within this paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111). Given the above, the researcher and the participant thus create a new understanding of school engagement through interaction and sharing their understanding of the concept. This new and shared understanding was constructed through various data-gathering activities.

By selecting to work within a constructivist paradigm, the researcher chose to work within a qualitative research design. Since this paradigm relies on understanding the human experience and is primarily aimed at seeking new ways of seeing and understanding the world, gathering qualitative data would best provide such insight and thus, a basic qualitative research design was chosen (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

3.2.3 Research design

Babbie and Mouton (2001) define research design as a “plan or blueprint of how you

intend conducting the research" (p. 74). In other words, the research design will enable a researcher to answer the research question through a specific plan or set of actions and the use of specific methods. For this study, a basic qualitative research design that falls within a broader research tradition was used to conduct the research, namely qualitative research. The qualitative research process has specific, distinctive characteristics that need to be understood so that the research design has meaning.

3.2.3.1 Characteristics of qualitative research

Qualitative research in a broader sense has four defining characteristics, namely the focus is on understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection; the research makes use of an inductive process; and the end product is richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The first characteristic of understanding and meaning refers to the qualitative research process used to make sense of the human experience and what it means to that individual (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, qualitative research aims to understand human behaviour patterns in different contexts from the perspective of the person who is being observed. Thus, the researcher is not concerned with their own personal interpretation and experience of phenomena in context but rather those of the person who is experiencing it (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The second defining characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is used as the main instrument in data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, the researcher can use the data collection methods to collect rich and thick data by being responsive to the participants and the context. The researcher is thus able to respond immediately to the participant in the field and adjust or adapt the questions or the analysis to suit the context or the participant (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, through the researcher being the main instrument of data collection, a deeper understanding of the phenomena being researched can be gained because the researcher can rely on 'in-person' verbal and non-verbal cues to clarify understanding and meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The third defining characteristic of qualitative research according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) is that this type of research makes use of an inductive process. This process implies that the researcher will use the data gathered to identify themes and concepts or to build theories instead of testing a hypothesis or proving a theory as in

other research traditions. Thus, the researcher uses the data collected to “build toward theory” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 17). In other words, the researcher does not impose theories, concepts or themes on the collected data but instead allows the data to ‘speak for itself’ by looking for recurring patterns and themes to guide the building of a theory or hypothesis.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the last defining characteristic of qualitative research is that the final research product of this process will yield a rich description. This implies that the research product will include descriptions of various aspects of the research process such as the context, participants and completed activities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence, the researcher relies on descriptions of findings to convey what has been researched rather than presentation of statistical findings as in other research traditions.

Considering these defining characteristics of qualitative research, the researcher of this thesis chose a basic qualitative research design. By choosing this design and research tradition, the researcher incorporated the characteristics mentioned above to answer the research question.

3.2.3.2 Basic qualitative research design

The emphasis within the basic qualitative research design is to understand the perspectives of research participants regarding their experiences of a phenomenon and how they interpret their experiences to construct meaning from them (Creswell, 2016; King & Given, 2012; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015; Patton, 2002; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Research participants’ worldviews or reality is constructed after they have experienced a phenomenon and interpreted it or assigned it meaning, and through this interpretation, constructed a reality that is relevant to them and their context. Therefore, the researcher is interested in how participants interpret and understand the phenomenon and in essence, their worldview or reality (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a researcher implementing this type of design in their research is interested in three aspects of participants’ experiences. The researcher firstly wants to know more about how participants understand their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Secondly, the researcher wants to determine how participants construct their worldviews or realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Lastly, the researcher wants to know more about the meaning that participants assign to experiences or phenomena in their lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of research design thus emphasises the characteristics of qualitative research that were mentioned above and enables the researcher to gain more insight into how the participants understand and interpret the phenomenon of learner engagement.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, this study is rooted in a social constructivism paradigm. Therefore, the chosen methodology should fall in line with the paradigm's understanding of how knowledge is created/generated and how reality is viewed. Furthermore, the methodology of any research project will shape the methods used in the process to answer the research question(s) (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008).

The social constructionism paradigm methodology is embedded within the "interaction between and among investigator and respondents" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). This implies that the researcher would gather data from the participant through meaningful interactions in their natural setting (Kawulich, 2015). The interactions would mainly be dependent upon the use of language.

3.4 SAMPLING OF THE POPULATION AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

3.4.1 Sampling of the population

The researcher made use of non-probability sampling as a means to sample the population. This sampling method implies that the researcher acknowledges that not every member of the population had the same chance of being chosen for the study (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015).

Within the non-probability sampling method, the researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling can be described as "an explicit definition of the kinds of data sources that are of interest" (King & Given, 2012, p. 800). With this form of sampling, the researcher selected participants who could yield the most relevant information or data relating to the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, participants were sampled from a population of learning support teachers who were teaching within the Western Cape province and working for the Metro Central Education District. These learning support teachers were sampled from nine circuits in which the researcher does not work to avoid a conflict of interest. The sample of the

research population for this research inquiry was thus delimited as follows: Learning support teachers teaching at a school where she/he encountered learners who have become disengaged from schooling.

3.4.2 Selection of participants

It was essential for the researcher to invite participants who have experience working with disengaged learners or who have encountered disengaged learners in their school. The researcher made use of the recommendations of the coordinator of learning support advisers that were indicated on a staff database list. After selecting the recommended participants, the researcher questioned the participants regarding their experience of disengaged learners. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to seven participants but the researcher only received three favourable replies. Thereafter, the researcher used her knowledge of other support teachers and their current schools and invited them to be additional participants. In total, six favourable replies were received.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 Individual interviews

The researcher used interviews as the primary method of data collection because they allowed the researcher to gain insight and understanding into the experiences of the research participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews enabled the researcher to access the research participants' worlds and understand their perspectives (Patton, 1987). During the interview process, the researcher made use of simple conversation to build rapport with the research participant and to clarify essential concepts or information that was shared (Given, 2012).

The researcher decided to use semi-structured interviews because they allowed the researcher to explore the contextual factors that the learning support teachers experience as possible reasons for learners disengaging or staying engaged in school. In other words, this method served to "add an inner perspective to outward behaviour" (Patton, 1987, p. 109). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions that were previously developed using an interview guide (Given, 2012; Patton, 1987).

The interview guide was developed during the researcher's ethics application process by using relevant literature regarding the constructs of school engagement and disengagement and by considering the research questions. A copy of the interview guide can be found in Addendum D. During the process of compiling the interview guide, the researcher's supervisor was consulted to ensure that the questions were open-ended instead of leading and closed-ended. Moreover, the interview guide was revised when it was piloted before the formal data collection.

The researcher piloted the interview guide with a trusted colleague via an online platform. The colleague was not one of the research participants. The piloting gave the researcher valuable insight into how the participants might interpret the questions. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to revise the order of the questions and include additional probes and additional questions during the piloting session to elicit answers that could address the research questions. Additionally, the researcher realised during the pilot that an explanation of certain constructs would allow the participants to answer the questions better; the participant in the pilot study appeared to have a linear understanding.

It should be noted that the semi-structured interviews were initially planned to take place in person at an agreed-upon central location. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of an international pandemic, coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19, the researcher decided to use online platforms instead. The use of online platforms allowed the researcher and participants to meet the social distancing requirements and the requirements set by the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were given a choice between two online platforms, Zoom or Whatsapp call. On both these platforms, the researcher was able to record the interviews and transcribe them.

All the participants were comfortable being interviewed on the Zoom platform. Before the start of each interview, the researcher revised critical ethical considerations and made the participants aware that the interview was being recorded for transcription of the collected data. The online platform was challenging to navigate, which restricted the researcher from reading body language and non-verbal cues.

Additionally, at times, the internet connection made interaction difficult because it was difficult to gauge if the participant had finished speaking or if there was a break in the

internet connection. However, the use of an online platform such as Zoom has certain advantages. The Zoom platform enabled the researcher and the participants to conduct interviews in 'spaces' in which they felt comfortable, thus helping participants to feel at ease during the process. Moreover, interviews could take place at times that suited the participants and from the comfort of their homes.

3.5.2 Narrative texts

Narrative texts are viewed as narrative data that can be gathered through various methods such as interviews, observations, visuals such as photographs and diary entries (Aarikka-Stenroos, 2010). In the current study, participants were asked to write a narrative text describing an intervention process with a learner who showed signs of disengagement. Given (2012) defines a narrative text as "a form of discourse that has been fixed by writing" (p. 2). In other words, narrative text is a form of communication or language captured through text or presented in writing.

At the start of the research process, the researcher intended to conduct a focus group interview with the research participants, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Due to the restrictions that the university placed on in-person interviews and the social distancing protocol, the researcher decided that these interviews would happen on an online platform. However, at times, it proved challenging to find times and dates that suited the participants. With the guidance and support of the researcher's supervisor, it was decided to ask the participants to write a narrative text explaining a scenario where their direct intervention made a difference in a learner's engagement in school or in the classroom.

The participants were given certain aspects that they could include in the narrative text such as when the problem occurred, role players included in the intervention process, the strategies that they employed to improve learner engagement in that particular case, lessons learnt from the process and how they would conduct the process differently in future. Furthermore, to ensure that all the participants provided a narrative description, the researcher allowed participants two weeks to complete it. After the narrative texts were received, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyse the data. A copy of the page emailed to participants can be viewed in Addendum E.

3.5.3 Reflective field notes

According to Patton (2002), field notes contain “the description of what has been observed” (p. 302). Thus, these notes should include any relevant observations made during individual interviews and focus-group interviews. The primary purpose of field notes is to provide the researcher with a detailed description of contextually based data that can later be used in data interpretation (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

The researcher completed the reflective notes immediately after the interviews. These notes provided space for the researcher to reflect on three aspects, namely essential observations during the interview, notes or concerns regarding the research method and personal experience of the process. Philippi and Lauderdale (2018) note that there is no specific framework or prescription regarding the content included in field notes. Patton (2002) explains that the reason for the lack of a universal guide for field notes is that different contexts require different ways of proceeding with data collection. It is a matter of personal choice and style. The author, however, notes that field notes should include the researcher’s personal experiences during the data collection and “your insights, interpretations, beginning analyses and working hypotheses” (Patton, 2002, p. 304). The researcher compiled the field notes based on these recommendations. A copy of a completed reflective field note can be seen in Addendum H.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

For this thesis, the researcher used two methods of data analysis, namely inductive and thematic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative research design, as was undertaken by the researcher, always relies on an inductive data analysis method. Inductive data analysis implies that the researcher emerged himself/herself within the research process and data gathering without a clear hypothesis or theory to test (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Sotuku & Duku, 2015). In this study, the researcher set out to investigate the experiences of learning support teachers in facilitating learner engagement without knowing if there is a relationship between the two entities.

Thematic analysis is a process in which the researcher seeks to find “common threads that extend across an entire interview or set of interviews” (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p.

400). Common threads or themes reduce the amount of data into smaller units to assist in interpretation. The researcher made use of the thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

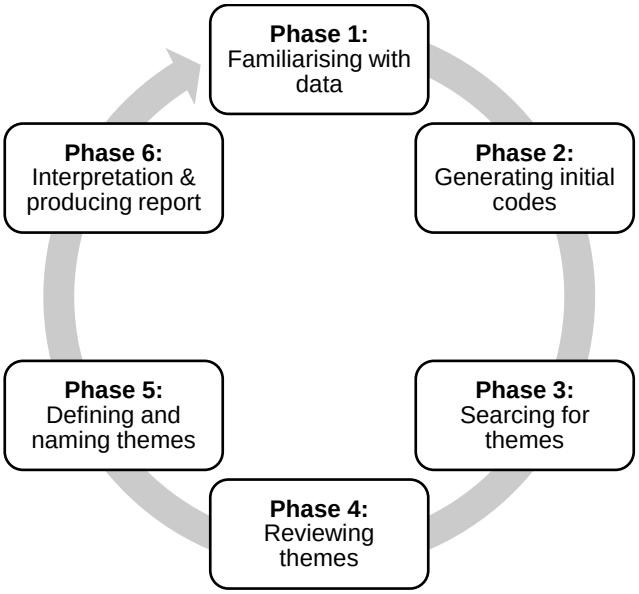

Figure 3.1: Representation of data analysis process

Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006

3.6.1 Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data

During this phase of the data analysis process, the researcher should become familiar with the data regarding the “depth and breadth of the content” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16). For this research report, the researcher familiarised herself with the data by transcribing the interviews and thereafter rereading them and marking important or interesting information. The researcher also made notes on the transcriptions regarding data that was likely to help the researcher answer the research questions.

3.6.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes

After immersing themselves in the data, researchers can progress to Phase 2. This phase of the data analysis involves coding of the data. Coding can be described as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). The researcher read through the

data sources and identified pieces of information that were relevant to answering the research questions. The identified pieces of important information were then assigned a code. These codes were grouped based on similarity, and categories were established. From these specific categories, certain themes or patterns emerged. This process was repeated with all the sets of gathered data. The researcher began coding the interview transcripts first.

3.6.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes

In the third phase of data analysis, the researcher searched for themes within the codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the researcher scrutinise the identified codes and determine how they may combine to form a theme. In other words, the researcher needs to engage critically with the identified codes and look for similarities or differences. Thereafter, similar codes are grouped to form a theme or a subtheme. During this phase of the data analysis, the researcher of this thesis took the time to examine the identified codes, searched for similarities to identify themes and determined how these codes differed from one another. A copy of the coded interviews and narrative texts can be found in addenda F and G.

3.6.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes

This data analysis phase involves re-examining the coded themes and inspecting the validity of the identified themes within the set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher critically examines whether the themes firstly, fit within the specific source of data such as an interview transcription and secondly, if the themes fit within all the sets of data. For this thesis, the researcher reviewed the identified codes from each data source and decided whether they were valid to answer the research question and select the identified theme. Thereafter, the researcher reviewed all the identified themes across the different data sources to examine whether the themes make sense within this study.

3.6.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the penultimate phase of the data analysis involves defining and naming the themes. This process also involves examining the theme so that the core of what the theme represents is captured and understood by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During Phase 5 of the data analysis for this

thesis, the researcher took the time to examine the identified themes and allocated names that represented the essence of each theme. The researcher also considered how the themes fit within the study's broader context and how they could answer the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight that the identified themes should tell an overall integrative story rather than individual stories. Thus, the researcher spent time ensuring continuity within the identified themes and the interpretation thereof so that the research questions could be answered.

3.6.6 Phase 6: Interpretation and writing the report

The last phase of the data analysis involved writing the report by interpreting and organising the final set of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, the researcher attempted to provide the reader with a clear picture of what the data represents. The researcher aimed to ensure that the themes “provide[d) a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23). The researcher of this thesis took the time to reflect on the themes and discern how they could answer the research questions. The themes were interpreted and analysed to provide answers for the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

3.7.1 Trustworthiness and dependability

Trustworthiness or validity of qualitative research can be defined as "the degree to which researchers' claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants' constructions of reality) being studied" (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 320). In this study, the researcher made use of a transactional validity approach. This approach implies that the researcher and the research participants revisited experiences, feelings, facts, values and beliefs throughout the research process to ensure that interpretation of the data was valid and trustworthy (Cho & Trent, 2006). The strategies that the researcher used are discussed below.

3.7.1.1 Member checking

One such strategy is the member checking process (Cho & Trent, 2006; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). This strategy is viewed as a control process to ensure the credibility, trustworthiness and accuracy of the collected data (Harper, 2012). The researcher

checked her understanding of what she heard during the interview process by providing participants with short summaries throughout the data collection.

The purpose of providing this type of verbal summaries during the interview process was to ensure that the researcher understood the participant's perspective and to ensure the authenticity of the gathered data. The participants thus had the choice to agree with the researcher's summarised understanding or to explain in more detail what they thought or understood. This strategy was beneficial with a particular participant who gave very fast and long descriptions but was reminded of the question when a summary was provided.

The member-checking process was extended to the end of the research process when the collected data were analysed and a preliminary report was given to the participants to read.

3.7.1.2 Triangulation

Another strategy that the researcher employed was triangulation, specifically data triangulation. Data triangulation refers to making use of several data sources in the data collection process (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cho & Trent, 2006; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). The purpose of data triangulation is to verify the consistency of the data and to reflect critically why differences may arise from different sources (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2014). In this study, the researcher made use of individual interviews, focus-group interviews and writing reflective field notes during the research process.

By using these various data collection methods, the researcher hoped to find consistency in the collected data and thus ensure that the data were credible. Furthermore, by triangulating the data sources, the researcher ensured that the different perspectives of learner engagement and the role that learning support teachers play in facilitating learner engagement were captured.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the researcher to meet all the ethical standards required by Stellenbosch University, this thesis was subjected to an ethics committee application and review process. This particular study was reviewed by the Social, Behavioural and Education Review Committee and was deemed ethical and awarded a clearance number (1175). A. copy of this notice of approval is presented in Addendum A. It is important to note

that ethical clearance was given on the condition that social distancing measures were strictly enforced through the use of online platforms.

3.8.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

The process of obtaining informed consent was adjusted due to the outbreak of an international pandemic. The researcher thus emailed the consent forms to possible participants after seeking permission from the relevant education district. To ensure that all participants understood the form, the researcher decided to discuss critical aspects of the research process before the individual interviews since informed consent is a process and not a single event (Kaiser, 2009). The researcher ensured that research participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any given point and their right not to answer a question if they felt uncomfortable. Participants were also reminded that their identities and their opinions indicated in the research report would be anonymous since each participant would be given a pseudonym.

3.8.2 Right to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

All research participants have the right to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. It was important for the researcher to uphold these rights. Various methods were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and the researcher ensured that no harm would befall the participants of the study.

One of the strategies used was allocating pseudonyms for the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Richards, 2002). The researcher removed all identifying information from the transcripts and other data sources and supplied each participant with a pseudonym. These pseudonyms with corresponding identifiable details were kept in a master identification file. A master identification file, according to Babbie and Mouton (2001), is a file created to link pseudonyms with identifiable details of participants in order to keep track of data.

The collected and transcribed data were stored in a secure location with limited access. The master identification file together with the data were stored in a home safe. Furthermore, the electronic data were stored on a computer that was password protected. The digital copy of the information was stored in a file format that was password protected to ensure confidentiality.

3.8.3 Respect and caring

The researcher also ensured that every participant felt that they were cared for and respected. The sense of care and respect was achieved by adhering to the ethical guidelines stated in this thesis. Protection of participants' identity and confidentiality was integral to the research.

3.8.4 Beneficence and non-maleficence

Throughout the research process, the researcher had the ethical obligation to minimise harm to the participants and maximise their benefits (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). In other words, the researcher had an obligation to ensure that no harm would befall the participant as a result of sharing data, and if there was a risk, exposure to that harm would be minimised. During this study, practices used to ensure non-maleficence were assurance of confidentiality and anonymity in the final research report and the continual protection of raw and interpreted data.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research paradigm and the research methodology were explained. The chapter also outlined how the research was conducted and how the raw data were interpreted. In the following chapter, the research findings and the interpretations thereof are discussed.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the researcher discussed the research process and the methodology that informed the study. This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the data that were gathered throughout the research process. As discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher used thematic analysis and thus, the results are presented through the themes that emerged.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, six learning support teachers from the Metro Central Education District in the Western Cape willingly participated in the study. During the individual interviews, the researcher inquired about specific biographical details such as their current age, marital status and qualifications. The data gathered during this part of the interviews are captured in the table below.

Table 4.1: Biographical data of research participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Qualifications	Teaching Experience	Learning Support Experience
Francis	50	Female	Married	B.Ed (Intersen Phase) School Counsellor	28 years	4 years
Kylie	48	Female	Married	Grade R (Sally Davids) B.Ed. Honours Management in Education	12 years	1 year
Betty	27	Female	Married	B.Ed. (Intermediate-Senior Phase)	4 years	3 years
Zita	33	Female	Married	B.Ed. (Foundation Phase)	9 years	6 years
Carly	55	Female	Single	Diploma in Special Needs Education Honours in Special Needs	18 years	18 years
Heather	52	Female	Married	B.Ed. (Intersen Phase) B.Ed. Honours degree in Special Needs Education & Learning Difficulties	30 years	14 years

All the participants were females with varying degrees and years of teaching experience. In general, learning support seems to be a female-dominated profession with very few males entering the field within the Metro Central Education District. It was noted that the younger participants seemed to join the learning support field with an undergraduate degree, while the older participants had multiple degrees. This difference between qualifications could be due to the time spent within the teaching field or the years of experience.

Furthermore, three of the six participants in this cohort of learning support teachers obtained an undergraduate degree specialising in the Intermediate-Senior Phase. Since the Metro Central Education District in the Western Cape focuses on early identification in the foundation phase, it is surprising that so many participants have an undergraduate degree that focuses on teaching learners in grades 4–7. To ensure that learning support teachers are equipped to support learners in the foundation phase, the district has exposed these participants to many different courses. For

example, most participants attended courses such as the basic concepts programme and the Annetjie Hannekom Reading Programme, also known as the AHA reading course.

"I have also received training while I was a learning support teacher like AHA [Annetjie Hannekom Reading Programme] and basic concepts" (Participant 1, interview).

" … and then the big one is supposed Stellenbosch reading course" (Participant 4, interview).

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES

Through the thematic analysis explained in Chapter 3, the researcher identified three themes from the individual interviews and the narrative texts. The researcher also examined her reflective field notes; some extractions are included in this discussion. The three themes and subthemes that were identified are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Presentation of themes

Theme 1: Participants' experiences of learner disengagement	**Subtheme 1.1:** Participants' understanding of learner disengagement
	Subtheme 1.2: Factors contributing to learner disengagement
	Subtheme 1.3: Preventative practices implemented by the school and learning support teacher to prevent school disengagement
Theme 2: Participants' experiences of learner engagement	**Subtheme 2.1:** Participants' understanding of learner engagement
	Subtheme 2.2: Behaviours that indicate learner engagement in the schooling and smaller learner-support context
	Subtheme 2.3: Learning support practices that enhance learner engagement
Theme 3: Participants' experiences of learning support	**Subtheme 3.1:** Participants' understanding of learning support and how the service is rendered in schools
	Subtheme 3.2: The type of learner referred for learning support
	Subtheme 3.3: Differences in learners' behaviour/academic achievement after attending learning support

4.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' experiences of learner disengagement

During the thematic analysis of both the individual interviews and the narrative texts, the theme of learner disengagement was identified. The following subthemes were subsequently identified: participants' understanding of learner disengagement; factors contributing to learner disengagement; preventative practices implemented by the school and learning support teacher to prevent school disengagement. The last subtheme relates directly to the secondary research question: *What preventative measures are employed by learning support teachers to ensure learner engagement?*

4.3.1.1 Participants' experiences of learner disengagement

As previously stated, the participants provided different examples of behaviour that indicate a learner disengaging from school rather than defining the concept in their own words. The five participants who were teaching within a primary school setting described disengaged learners similarly, referring to learners who do not pay attention in class, the 'naughty' learner in the back or the learner standing outside the classroom. According to Participant 1,

> *those are the children that stand outside of classes. Those are the children that sits [*sic*] somewhere at the back or many of them are what the teachers would say is my troublemakers or the children that do not listen … is the children that are naughty.* (Participant 1, interview)

Participant 3 described disengaged learners as follows:

"Not focusing on what you are busy doing or trying to do. Not doing what you would like the child to do" (Participant 3, interview).

A participant teaching in a high school context described more extreme disengaged behaviour such as smoking on school grounds, bullying and 'bunking'. The escalation in what could be described as delinquent behaviour can be explained by the developmental phase of the learners. Participant 6 described disengaged behaviour within her schooling context as follows:

> *Children smoking may be children sometimes disengaging, and they are just on their cell phone devices. And then children that might be trying to bunk … So learners who are disengaged are the learners who are sometimes from the morning onward. Even if they are dressed as a learner going to school from their home, they enter the premises and then they find a way not to be inside the classroom.* (Participant 6, interview)

Participant 6 described disengaged learners further as actively trying not to be in the classroom, even engaging in violence despite the consequences for misbehaviour such as suspension:

> *]A] frustrated learner who want[s] to disengage will find a reason or someone …. So they will sometimes find a victim on the … or in the corridors or on the playground*

> *…. They will make a scene and then they know, for example, what the consequences are of that would be that they have to now sit and wait until the parents come and fetches [*sic*] them. So, you all have planned disengagement.* (Participant 6, interview)

It would seem from the quotations above that all the research participants have experienced learner disengagement within their schooling context. The researcher and the participants also explored possible contributing factors that could lead to a learner becoming disengaged within the schooling context. In the follwing section, the second subtheme, factors contributing to learner disengagement, is discussed.

4.3.1.2 Factors contributing to learner disengagement

The participants shared their experiences of external factors that actively influence a learner's ability to engage in school. These factors were located within both the school and the community. Within the schooling context, five participants identified that an overcrowded classroom and the pressure to finish the curriculum contributed to learners becoming disengaged from the schooling context.

"At the moment, many of our lessons in the mainstream classroom is [sic] lecturing, and children switch off, and they are not part of that …" (Participant 1, interview).

"If we think of the mainstream class, the teacher is moving at a faster pace" (Participant 4, interview).

"It is more curriculum cover. It is more questions. Sometimes, it is text overload" (Participant 4, interview).

"Like I said, with teaching, the teachers are not fully prepared. Big classroom sizes" (Participant 5, interview).

Two participants also expressed the view that some classroom teachers label individual learners before the learners even enter their classrooms. These labels tend to follow learners from class to class and grade to grade, creating a sense of unrelatedness. Learners who have been labelled then struggle to engage in the classroom and exhibit disengaged behaviours.

"This is not always easy because often the teacher has a pre-conceived idea of who the child is or family history due to many factors, i.e., the previous teachers' opinion" (Participant 2, narrative text).

Participants also shared their experiences of how community factors influenced learners' ability to engage in their schooling actively. Overall, participants felt that events that take place in the community such as gang violence or exposure to traumatic events either before school or after school affect the learner's ability to engage in the classroom:

"I think that when the learners come to school, many of them are stressed …. If a child comes to school and is emotionally a wreck, then it is difficult for them to take part and be a part and participate" (Participant 1, interview).

When asked if community factors influence learner engagement in her school, Participant 5 provided the following answer:

"Definitely. Most times, it stems from home—absentee parents, incidents that happen at home and also, we have a few isolated learners that are abusing drugs" (Participant 5, interview).

Participant 6 also mentioned the role of parents or parental influence. However, she framed it within the context of the lack of a role model and rules:

"A lot of the kids do not have role models, or maybe they do not have homes with rules or curfew "(Participant 6, interview).

> *His mother is illiterate, and he often goes with his grandfather to do temporary bricklaying. It is difficult for the learner to stay motivated to attend school because of the lack of a role model and a gang-infested living area.* (Participant 6, interview)

As can be seen from the discussion above, various factors contribute to learners' ability to engage within the schooling context. Participants identified factors within both the school and the community that contribute to learners becoming disengaged. However, it must be mentioned that participants also discussed a variety of preventative measures that have been introduced in the classrooms by the school to prevent learners from permanently disengaging. In the following section, the third

subtheme, preventative practices implemented by the school and learning support teacher to prevent school disengagement, is discussed.

4.3.1.3 Practices implemented by school and learning support teachers to prevent school disengagement

Participants identified and discussed preventative practices and strategies implemented by both the school and themselves to prevent learners from disengaging. The identified strategies or preventative practices are drivers applicable to the unique nature of each school. Two participants taught at schools with the same district-based manager, and many of their preventative practices involved the use of outside resources such as non-profit organisations to ensure learners stay engaged in schooling. At other schools, the drive to keep learners from disengaging comes from school management and the culture that is created throughout the school.

The two participants who share the same district-based manager referenced several non-profit organisations that provide support for both learners and parents. Participant 1 expressed the following:

> *So I have about 24 volunteer ladies coming in. They are working with the Grade 1s and 2s, and we are also doing some other things with the Grade 4 learners that are struggling—specifically, the isiXhosa learners that are struggling.* (Participant 1, interview)

Participant 4 referred to school-based practices such as the cultivation of positive school culture by disallowing screaming in classrooms, installing technology in classrooms to make lessons more interactive and engaging, and using early identification of struggling learners by tracking their progress academically:

"Teachers do keep an eye out, and then those teachers have like the smart board and stuff; so they do like try to make it exciting" (Participant 4, interview).

"So ja, I think we do as a school try to make it a safe environment and sometimes the teacher is over-loud. Like if you scream at a kid, you will get reprimanded" (Participant 4, interview).

Participant 4 continued

> *I also do that where you sit with the entire school's mark schedule, and I go and highlight and I work out statistics. This is what the results of the children are and these are the learners in need of support, or these are the learner's at risk of repeating or these learners already repeated.* (Participant 4, interview)

Participant 6 who works in the high school context shared her experiences of preventing disengagement in an older cohort of learners. For example, she shared that the school implements a peer monitor system in which learners are responsible for checking attendance in each class. Should a learner be absent in one class but present in another, this type of behaviour can be detected early and intervention can be provided.

"I must say that at this particular school, they have a system whereby they have monitors when they enter the classroom to check on attendance. I think they have two monitors per class" (Participant 6, interview).

Participant 6 also shared how the school purchased a specific reading programme to improve the academic performance of its Grade 8 cohort:

> *The school realised over the years that their Grade 8 results were not great. So they invested in doing the LitPro programme for all Grade 8 learners, hoping that in five years' time, they will have a stronger Grade 12 cohort. So the LitPro programme is great in terms of teaching children skills. When I say preventative, it might be preventative for the dropout rate or the school has a higher pass rate.* (Participant 6, interview)

It would seem from the findings that each school implements different types of preventative practices and strategies depending on the school's needs. The following section discusses the participants' experiences of learner engagement.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Participants' experiences of learner engagement

This theme relates directly to the primary research question: "*What is the role of the learning support teacher in facilitating learner engagement in mainstream schools?"* The subthemes that were identified were participants' understanding of learner engagement; behaviours that indicate learner engagement in the schooling and

smaller learner-support context; and learning support practices that enhance learner engagement.

4.3.2.1 Participants' understanding of learner engagement

Primarily, the participants associated learner engagement with positive classroom behaviours such as paying attention, taking part and answering questions after a lesson. The learning support teachers in this research cohort did not refer to learner engagement within the larger school context, for example, participation in sport or cultural activities. Their limited experience of learner engagement regarding other activities could be due to their specific role in the school in which they are not expected to be included in other school activities such as sport and culture. The participants mostly described academic and behavioural engagement that is readily observable in the small group context:

"Learner engagement—I understand that as how the learner engages with the curriculum, how they engage during the lesson" (Participant 5, interview).

"Learner engagement is what we do to get the child interested in taking part in whatever we are busy with" (Participant 1, interview).

It is important to note that the participant teaching in a high school had a different understanding of learner engagement. Participant 6 described learner engagement as an active choice that learners need to make every day:

"Learners have to choose today—when I am coming to school, do I want to engage?" (Participant 6, interview).

In line with the high school learner's developmental phase (adolescence), it is expected that high school learners demonstrate more autonomy and responsibility for their learning. In other words, within a high school context, learners wanting to finish 'matric' need to perhaps be interested and take responsibility for their learning while in a primary school context, learning is still driven by the teacher, particularly in the foundation phase. Learning in high school could thus be described as learner-driven.

The second subtheme identified is behaviours that indicate learner engagement in the schooling and smaller learner-support context.

4.3.2.2 Behaviours that indicate learner engagement in the schooling and smaller learner-support context

Participants found it easier to indicate the behaviours of learners who appeared to be actively engaged than explaining their understanding of the concept of learner engagement. Most participants described learners as actively engaged when they were present in the lesson and participating, giving their opinions, answering questions and using the manipulatives. It would seem that all participants felt that learners in their small groups were for the most part, actively engaged in their lessons:

"how they speak their mind … how they feel … what they understand …" (Participant 1, interview).

"Partaking—they want to be heard, and they want to just share their opinions freely, and some of them would even challenge you in terms of their opinions" (Participant 6, interview).

Participants felt that learners were better able to engage in the learning support class than in the mainstream classroom due to various support structures and teaching strategies that enhance learner engagement. These support structures and teaching strategies are discussed further in the following subthemes. However, it is essential to mention that the participants felt that learners were able to engage better and to display more engaged behaviours due to various factors such as smaller classroom size and simply a more conducive learning environment for that specific learner:

"We are not one of 40 now … I can focus on them … the attention is on them, and they are now important. What they are saying is now important" (Participant 1, interview).

Specific strategies to enhance learner engagement are discussed in the following section.

4.3.2.3 Learning support practices that enhance learner engagement

Through the interviews and narrative texts, the participants were able to indicate the best practices in their classrooms that contribute to learner engagement. The participants mainly focused on support practices and teaching strategies that they implement in the small group classroom context but shared that some of these

strategies are transferable to the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, the participants identified the importance of spending time to get to know the learners in their groups.

"TRUGS stands for teaching, reading, using games. So basically, [I] use different card games to teach reading like snap or find a word" (Participant 3, interview).

"I would always do a brain gym activity, and I always have a rhyme in my session or singing with them" (Participant 2, interview).

Participants within this study shared the following views on the importance of the teacher-learner relationship:

"I love spending a few minutes in my period with my children on just touching base" (Participant 1, interview).

Participant 1 elaborated:

"It is also about building up that trust so that they feel comfortable, and if we have that out of the way, then they are more focused and involved in whatever we are doing" (Participant 1, interview).

Participant 4 indicated what she does daily to build a trusting relationship with her learners:

> *And you know, to create a bond first because no child … I learnt over the years, even before being a learning support teacher, is like you first create the bond and gain the child's trust so that they can trust you and prove to you that they want to work and they want to try.* (Participant 4, interviews)

Although Participant 6 is based at a high school and works with learners within a different developmental phase, this participant also felt that building a trusting relationship is essential for effective teaching and learning:

"So I try and connect with them by means of acknowledging them. Also, how you speak with them and how you acknowledge them in front of others … it enables you to build a relationship with them" (Participant 6, interview).

From the quotations, it is evident that the research participants share the views indicated in literature regarding the importance of the teacher-learner relationship

within the context of learner engagement. However, the teacher-learner relationship is not the only mechanism used to support learners who are referred for learning support:

"Because I must now use a different style of teaching with them" (Participant 2, interview).

"I am very mindful of seeing or evaluating how much these learners are busy learning. So for me, I will try and teach a quarter of the time, and then I will ask for feedback, and then we will revisit …" (Participant 6, interview).

Participant 4 elaborates how she uses different teaching strategies and teaching and learning material to keep learners interested and engaged in her classroom:

"Making things tantalising, I suppose. Bringing in my laptop, doing movement and songs, uhm, you know, all that fun stuff" (Participant 4, interview).

Concerning curriculum adaptation, Participant 4 noted the following:

> *It is definitely adapted. The questions are shorter. The fonts are bigger. It is more adapted to suit their needs, where in the mainstream … it is aimed at the progression of the kids. So yes, the mainstream classroom is faster paced. It is more curriculum cover.* (Participant 4, interview)

Participant 6 disclosed:

> *I requested a tablet from the school and created picture icon folders for his Gr8 subjects. This way, he can access the correct subject folder by picture icon association even though he struggles to read. Furthermore, I audio recorded some of his Folklore and other short stories in English LOLT and Afrikaans First Additional Language. This gave him access to repeatedly listen to the stories with earphones in both the LS and Mainstream classroom.* (Participant 6, narrative text)

Participant 4 elaborated on her implementation of a specific holistic approach to teaching:

"I am talking about a holistic approach. I mean full-on sensory because we learn the sound through movement, auditory and then visually. For our tactile learners, I bring in objects" (Participant 4, interviews).

From the discussion above, it would seem that the participants understand the value of including different teaching methods, strategies and teaching and learning material to ensure that learners remain engaged in the lessons conducted in their classrooms. In the following section, the theme relating to the participants' experiences of learning support is discussed.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Participants' experiences of learning support

During the thematic analysis of the individual interviews and the narrative texts, the third theme, the participants' experiences of learning support, was identified. The following subthemes were also identified: participants' understanding of learning support and how the service is rendered in schools; types of learners referred for learning support; and the differences in behaviour and academic achievement after attending learning support.

4.3.3.1 Participants' understanding of learning support and how the service is rendered in schools

The participants shared a collective understanding of learning support and how it is rendered. All the participants consider themselves to be in a supporting capacity, with the majority focusing on learners in the foundation phase so that struggling learners can be identified early. Participant 6 who works in the high school context shared that she focuses on early identification by concentrating her support in Grade 8.

Support is not only rendered to learners but is also extended to parents and teachers. Within the schooling context, it appears that learning support teachers have many roles and responsibilities, and these vary from attending meetings to meeting with parents regarding how to support their children at home.

Participants shared the following thoughts in relation to learning support within the schooling context.

"I am helping them in small groups. We work on where their difficulties are, and we focus on that" (Participant 1, interview).

"I try to get learners not to fail and get learners to do better that has not yet failed" (Participant 3, interview).

"I withdrew learners as support groups from each class in each grade in the foundation phase" (Participant 4, narrative text).

Participant 6 who is stationed at a high school shared the following on how she provides learning support for Grade 8 learners:

"The general focus of any learning support teacher should obviously be to assist the learners to address their challenges. Not all barriers are not really always possible to solve or to remedy. But you can give them coping strategies …" (Participant 6, interview).

Participant 6 also highlighted the importance of providing learners who come for support with skills and ensuring that they are still able to keep up with the mainstream classroom teacher. The other participants, however, placed more emphasis on supporting the learners on their level. The difference in approaches could be ascribed to the different developmental phases of the learners they teach and the different academic demands:

> *And then, of course, the big thing is to teach them skills. To support the children … yes, addressing their needs but supporting them in an integrated way whereby they can still keep track of what is happening in the classroom.* (Participant 6, interview)

As mentioned before, although the participants provide support mainly to learners through small group withdrawals, learners are not the only stakeholders within the schooling context who they support. The participants reported that they also provide support for teachers and parents:

"I have meetings with parents about their children's progress and how to help their children and giving them advice and support to help the children. And also the teacher[s], I have lots of meetings with them" (Participant 1, interview).

"I give advice to teachers and sit in meetings with them. It is also sharing skills and helping with programmes and all of that stuff" (Participant 5, interview).

Two of the participants who were interviewed also mentioned the support they provide for the school management team.

"I am also an SMT member [school management team]. I am involved with every single issue at the school" (Participant 4, interview).

"And also to support the principal and the management in whichever the direction the school wants to go and in which area they want to improve" (Participant 2, interview).

Hence, the participants not only provide support for struggling learners but also contribute to the overall support measures at schools. Support rendered at the participants' schools could thus be described as holistic because the various role players within the learner's life such as the classroom teacher and the child's parents also receive support. The subtheme, types of learners referred for learning support, is discussed in the following section.

4.3.3.2 Types of learners referred for learning support

Throughout the individual interviews and narrative texts, the participants highlighted the type of learner typically referred to them for extra support:

*"Leaner [*sic*] x's barriers were picked up when learner x struggled in grade 2 and then the need to repeat grade 2. I withdrew learners from each class, and I immediately picked up that learner x was fidgety and restless"* (Participant 4, narrative text).

"I have been working mostly with children who have gaps in their LOLT. Plus also the fact that most of the kids do not attend Grade R" (Participant 5, interview).

Some learners referred for support also seemed to demonstrate other risk factors for disengagement such as misbehaviour:

"The teacher spoke to me and said, 'I don't think he is going to make it and it doesn't help that this child has no support from home and he is just not interested in anything. He is naughty'" (Participant 1, interview).

"The learner was referred to learning support due to his misbehaviour and not meeting the minimum pass requirement in both English and Mathematics" (Participant 2, narrative text)

From the participants' experiences, it is clear that the type of learner referred for learning support is unique in every context. In some instances, the lack of attending Grade R plays a role whereas in other instances, language seems to be a barrier for the referred learners. However, all the learners referred for support were struggling with the academic aspect of schooling. The following section discusses the differences in behaviour and academic achievement of learners after attending learning support.

4.3.3.3 The differences in behaviour and academic achievement of learners after attending learning support

Throughout the individual interviews and the narrative texts, the participants shared with the researcher what they perceive to be their 'success stories' with regard to a learner they supported. Some participants reported learners who have become top achievers, while other participants considered a positive change in behaviour as a success. Since each schooling context is different and diverse, each participant's sense of achievement regarding learner support will differ. However, attending learning support can make a difference in the academic life of a struggling learner:

> *One of the learners I worked with is now a top achiever in Grade 6. She is isiXhosa home language. So I helped her with listening skills. I started there. She managed to pick up quickly. I worked with her for two years.* (Participant 5, interview)

> *The learner was in Grade 3; he had a reputation of this bad boy always disrupting the class, and he was always sitting outside. And then I started working with him, and we talked a lot, and he improved so much that at the end of the year, he was doing so well. He passed Grade 4. At the end, his whole self-esteem changed and his attitude changed.* (Participant 1, interview)

Although the impact of the support provided at schools from the participants may vary, it would appear that their support makes a significant difference in learners' lives. Understandably, not every learner who attends learning support is equally influenced by the support that is provided nor is the support provided sufficient for all learners. The research findings are discussed in more depth in the following section.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.4.1 Influence of proximal interactions on learner engagement

The research findings indicate that school engagement within the different school contexts is influenced by reciprocal and proximal interactions between the learner and the learning support teacher and the quality of that relationship. For instance, the participants reported that time is spent cultivating an excellent teacher-learner relationship with the learners referred for support. Research has found that the teacher-learner relationship can be a vehicle through which learner engagement is

facilitated (Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Teuscher & Makarova, 2018).

It appears that participants found that their mainstream teacher counterparts find it difficult to give one-on-one attention to struggling learners, which leads to these learners requiring additional support. Through falling behind the mainstream, struggling learners' self-esteem and confidence are influenced negatively. At times, the participants reported that these struggling learners become despondent and eventually disengage. The participants found that spending time building a trusting relationship with the struggling learners helped them in providing academic support. These findings correspond with findings in research that indicate that when learners feel that their teacher is interested in them, actively listens to them and shows mutual respect, these learners achieve better academic results and engage in the schooling context more actively (Bowen & Brewster, 2004).

The data indicated the presence of large classes and pressure to finish the curriculum in schools. Consequently, the participants felt that the small group context helped create a teaching context where learners could actively engage. Participants conveyed that because their curriculum goals were reduced, they had the time to listen actively to learners in the smaller group context, to engage with them in regard to their interests and hobbies, and to manage disruptive learners restoratively. The participants' experiences concur with previous research, which has shown that individualised curriculum programmes or smaller teaching groups can facilitate learner engagement (Fredricks, 2011; Pyle & Wexler, 2012).

Using smaller teaching groups, the participants reported that they could implement creative teaching strategies, include more technology, adapt learning materials and incorporate learning through play. Participants described using teaching strategies such as curriculum differentiation to reduce the amount of curriculum cover or adapting the typing font of worksheets to give all learners the opportunity to engage. Furthermore, participants shared their experiences of including movement in lessons to regulate learners' attention and incorporating games to keep content attractive. Technology in the classroom was also mentioned as a prominent inclusion in their everyday teaching practices to keep up to date with learners' interests.

Another reciprocal interaction or proximal interaction that influences a learner's ability to engage within the schooling context can be found within the home. The data also indicated that factors within the family system influence the learner's ability to engage in school. For example, participants mentioned that lack of parental involvement or even the parents' employment status can lead to school disengagement. These findings concur with the research findings of Lee and Burkham (2003) who found that social risk factors such as the lack of parental involvement or family structure can hamper learner engagement in the schooling context.

Lastly, the data revealed that the learning support teachers in this study implement various teaching strategies and creative approaches to teaching, and learner engagement is facilitated through these structured learning support programmes. It appears that the participants in this study are able to create a learning environment in the small group context in which learners can engage actively with curriculum content, albeit on an adapted level. Participants also attempt to facilitate learner engagement in the larger classroom context by supporting teachers and even parents. However, this type of support is only rendered to learners who are referred for learning support.

4.4.2 Influence of contextual factors on learner engagement

The findings of this study also indicated that the participants experienced the influence of various systems on the learner's ability to engage within the schooling context. Participants reported that factors within both the school and the community appeared to influence learners' ability to engage in schooling actively. These findings coincide with both international and South African literature indicating that risk factors or contributing factors to disengagement can be academic or social risk factors (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Within the South African literature, these risk factors or contributing factors are referred to as push and pull factors situated within the learner's micro-system (Branson et al., 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2011; Hartnack, 2017).

Participants in the current study reported that factors within the school system or 'push' factors can obstruct a learner's ability to engage actively. The data found that classroom size was a significant contributing factor to learners displaying disengaged behaviours such as being disruptive or not actively taking part. Turner et al. (2014) and Christenson et al. (2012) found that classroom settings can significantly affect a

learner's ability to engage in the classroom because it is more challenging for mainstream classroom teachers to build trusting relationships and incorporate teaching strategies that enhance engagement.

Participants mentioned that the teaching styles of mainstream teachers exclude struggling learners because the teachers would fall behind in meeting the curriculum goals as set out in their teaching plans. The data showed that mainstream teachers resort to a 'chalk-and-talk' method due to large class sizes, which is not conducive to the learning of all learners. Lessons hence become mundane and are not interactive or exciting. Another school factor that was indicated as a push factor is the current curriculum. The data suggested that participants felt that the pressure on the teacher to complete the curriculum within a set time created circumstances for struggling learners to become lost and eventually to disengage from schooling. Additionally, the curriculum can be viewed as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to learning, which can discourage learner engagement.

4.4.3 Influence of 'person' factors on learner engagement

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the researcher also investigated school engagement from the perspective that factors located within the learner can contribute to a learner's ability to engage in the schooling context. The self-system model of motivational development argues that every person has basic psychological needs for a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Should these needs be satisfied through opportunities created within the classroom and the broader school context, the learner would be able to engage in schooling.

From the gathered data and consulting the literature, most learners who are referred for learning support can be described as being at risk of becoming disengaged since research has found that many learners who fail to achieve academically ultimately leave school early (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012; McDermott et al., 2018; O'Toole & Due, 2015). The learners referred for learning support can be viewed as being disengaged, with their basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence not being met in the mainstream classroom.

Additionally, participants described learners being referred for learning support as learners with additional risk factors. The data revealed that many learners attending

learning support for academic reasons also show other signs of disengagement such as behavioural problems. Futhermore, research has found that misbehaving learners are also at risk of dropping out of school in the long term (Balfanz, Herzog, & Douglas, 2007; Christenson et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2012). Thus, the data shows that the type of learner being referred for learning support is not only showing signs of becoming academically disengaged but also showing signs of becoming disengaged on a behavioural level.

Moreover, the data showed that for the most part, the learning support teachers who participated in this study were able to create opportunities for competence and relatedness. Providing support to struggling learners in the small group context created opportunities for learners to experience a sense of achievement. Participants shared best practices and strategies for keeping learners engaged in their classrooms. These included providing learners with activities adapted to a slower pace and incorporating aspects of movement into the classroom. By adapting activities and allowing learners more time to complete activities, the participants created a sense of competence. This sense of competence allowed learners to become more engaged in the mainstream classroom and improved their self-esteem.

Furthermore, the data revealed that the learning support participants dedicate time to create a sense of relatedness in their classrooms. Participants shared that they allocate time in their sessions to build trusting relationships with their learners. Data showed that participants regularly check in with students regarding their emotional well-being and allow learners space in which to talk about concerns relating to their lives. In some instances, the school itself provides opportunities to create a sense of relatedness; volunteers as non-profit organisations spend time talking to learners about their lives.

4.4.4 Influence of preventative measures on learner engagement

From the data, the researcher established that both the participants and their respective schools are actively trying to ensure that learners do not disengage. Pyler and Wexler (2012) recommended a threefold intervention programme in their research on keeping learners engaged, which also entailed a school wide prevention programme. Participants described preventative practices such as early identification

of disengagement by examining learners' academic records, introducing technology in the class to keep learners engaged, and creating a positive school culture.

Participants also stated that they introduced the services of non-profit organisations in their schools to prevent learners from becoming disengaged. These services involved community volunteers who work with the learners on academic skills such as reading and who give the learners an opportunity to speak to an adult about problems they may be experiencing at home or at school. Certain aspects of the programmes introduced in schools by the non-profit organisations include the parents of the learners. The non-profit organisations provide training for the parents on how they can support their learners at home and how they can improve their parenting skills. In this instance, preventative strategies and practices target different role players and systems in which the learner functions and ultimately positively influence a learner's ability to engage (Christenson et al., 2012; Yusof et al., 2018).

However, it must be mentioned that the programmes of these non-profit organisations target a specific age group. Because learning support teachers, including the participants in this study, are expected to use early identification in their practice, many of these services are provided only for learners in the foundation phase. This leaves vulnerable older learners in the Intermediate-Senior Phase at risk of becoming disengaged.

The above data gathered from the participants indicate that learning support teachers facilitate learner engagement in schools since learners referred to them can be viewed as being in the process of disengaging. Although learning support teachers work with a targeted group of learners who have been identified as struggling, they can facilitate learner engagement in their classrooms by implementing various teaching methods and practices such as cultivating a good teacher-learner relationship. These strategies can also be used in the mainstream classroom context to facilitate learner engagement. Limitations of the study are discussed in the following section.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the research findings are focused on a specific research context (the Metro Central Education Department), the data gathered through this study can help to guide future learning support teachers and school practices. Specifically, the data can help learning support teachers, school staff and district-based staff in facilitating learner

engagement among learners who are struggling to engage actively. The data presented above indicated that learning support teachers are playing a role in facilitating learner engagement in schools. However, it is limited to those learners referred for learning support. With guidance and support, these strategies could, however, be used in the mainstream classroom.

4.5.1 Schoolwide preventative programmes

The preventative programmes implemented in some schools by learning support teachers focus only on the foundation phase grades (grades 1–3) while little to no support is provided for the higher grades (grades 4–7). It is the researcher's recommendation for schools and district-based role players to invest in preventative programmes that include learners across the grades. Pyler and Wexler (2012) suggested a schoolwide preventative programme as part of their three-fold intervention programme to enhance learner engagement. Furthermore, these preventative programmes should focus on both academic and emotional support aspects.

4.5.2 Satisfying the basic psychological needs of learners through adapting teaching practices

Research on improving learner engagement in schools has demonstrated the importance of cultivating a sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence among learners (Saeki & Quirk, 2015). Turner et al. (2014) argue that instruction is at the heart of the learner and teacher interaction and can thus be viewed as the vehicle that can enhance or facilitate learner engagement. Mainstream teachers and learning support teachers should, therefore, use teaching practices and strategies in their classes that satisfy learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence. A sense of relatedness could be cultivated through simple strategies such as peer-group learning or taking the time to build a safe and trusting relationship between the learner and teacher.

4.5.3 Improving the classroom setting

Learners' disengagement has also been linked to classroom settings and their quality (Turner et al., 2014). Within the South African context, a significant factor in the quality of a learner's education experience and classroom settings is the number of learners

per class (Marais, 2016). For schools and classroom teachers to enhance learners' ability to engage in classroom settings fully, classrooms should not be overcrowded. Overcrowded classes make it difficult and challenging for teachers to employ and manage teaching strategies such as scaffolding or peer-group learning. Schools should, therefore, make a concerted effort to stay within the set ratio or provide teachers with classroom assistants.

4.5.4 Cultivating a positive teacher-learner relationship

As mentioned in Chapter 2, extensive international research has found that a positive teacher-learner relationship can enhance or facilitate learner engagement (Anderson et al., 2004; Bowen & Brewster, 2004; Christenson et al., 2012; Fredricks, 2011; Furlong et al., 2003; Klem & Connell, 2004; Pyle & Wexler, 2012). The data indicates that learning support teachers spend time cultivating positive relationships with learners by getting to know them and listening to their concerns. However, it appears that some mainstream classroom teachers struggle to find the time because curriculum delivery is seen as a priority.

Although curriculum delivery should be foremost in schools, learners would perhaps more easily engage with the curriculum if time were spent building a trusting relationship. Martin and Collie (2019) suggest that teachers should take time to get to know the learners and affirm all learners in their classroom. This strategy implies that teachers should start with learners with no preconceptions rather than believing the ‘labels’ that can follow learners from grade to grade. Teachers can affirm learners by making them feel that their opinions, thoughts and feelings are important and by including activities and topics that interest them (Martin & Collie, 2019). Another strategy suggested by Martin and Collie (2019) is that teachers should provide clear feedback regarding the expectations and outcomes of assignments and assessments.

4.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE STUDIES

A limitation of the study is that the researcher did not interview the learners to ascertain their perceptions of their level of engagement in school. By not interviewing the learners themselves, it was challenging to determine whether attending learning support classes changed their engagement in schooling or if other factors played a part. In other words, the study gained insights and experiences of the schooling

context of only one of the role players. Future studies should include the learners' perspectives, specifically primary school learners since not many studies on school engagement within this population have been conducted. It would also be important to include the perspective of primary school learner's parents as they could possibly have more insight around learner engagement.

Another direction for future studies is investigating the process involved regarding the learner who has dropped out of school and subsequently decides to re-enter the schooling system. In South Africa, such learners are known as 'out of school learners' and range from primary school learners to high school learners. The parents' decision to keep them at home and how the specific learners experience re-integration into the schooling context would create valuable insight for schools and policymakers. Hence, it would be essential to investigate what support structures are provided for these learners to ensure that they remain in school this time.

It would also be valuable to gain insight into how the school management team or mainstream classroom teachers experience the phenomena of school engagement and disengagement. From the literature, it is clear that school structure and culture can either facilitate learner engagement or encourage learner disengagement (Christenson et al., 2012). It would be beneficial for school-based role players such as the school management team to gain perspective regarding the aspects that encourage and discourage learner disengagement.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen from the discussion in this chapter based on the gathered data, learning support teachers play a role in facilitating learner engagement in schools. The data revealed that the support provided by learning support teachers regarding facilitating learner engagement is significant and should be made available to all schools. Although their support may be targeted and limited to the foundation phase learners, they can help learners become more engaged in the small classroom context and the mainstream class by implementing relevant good teaching practices. However, it is essential to note that the data showed that mainstream classroom teachers are overburdened with too many learners in South Africa. Overcrowded classrooms obstruct these mainstream teachers ability to teach engagingly.

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ADDENDUM A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM THE REC

UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

27 June 2020

Project number: 11175

Project Title: The role of the Learning Support teacher in facilitating learner engagement.

Dear Mrs Elzahn Van der Linde

Your REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form submitted on 25 May 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
26 June 2020	25 June 2023

SUSPENSION OF PHYSICAL CONTACT RESEARCH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown measures, all research activities requiring physical contact or being in undue physical proximity to human participants has been suspended by Stellenbosch University. Please refer to a formal statement issued by the REC: SBE on 20 March for more information on this.

This suspension will remain in force until such time as the social distancing requirements are relaxed by the national authorities to such an extent that in-person data collection from participants will be allowed. This will be confirmed by a new statement from the REC: SBE on the university's dedicated Covid-19 webpage.

Until such time online or virtual data collection activities, individual or group interviews conducted via online meeting or web conferencing tools, such as Skype or Microsoft Teams are strongly encouraged in all SU research environments.

If you are required to amend your research methods due to this suspension, please submit an amendment to the REC: SBE as soon as possible. The instructions on how to submit an amendment to the REC can be found on this webpage: [instructions], or you can contact the REC Helpdesk for instructions on how to submit an amendment: applyethics@sun.ac.za.

GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:

INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (11175) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

ADDENDUM B: LETTER OF PERMISSION FROM THE WCED

Western Cape Government
Education

Directorate: Research

Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za
tel: +27 021 467 9272
Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20190814-7860
ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Elzahn Van der Linde
16 Ascot Mews
27 Grand National Boulevard
Milnerton
7441

Dear Mrs Elzahn Van der Linde

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHER IN FACILITATING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **14 January 2020 till 15 September 2020**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

    The Director: Research Services
    Western Cape Education Department
    Private Bag X9114
    CAPE TOWN
    8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard
Directorate: Research
DATE: 16 August 2019

ADDENDUM C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS

UNIVERSITEIT•STELLENBOSCH•UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Elzahn Van der Linde, from the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a possible participant because you are currently employed as a Learning Support Educator by the Western Cape Education Department in the central district.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the role of the Learning Support Educator in facilitating learner engagement in mainstream schools. In particular, what kind of preventative measures are put in place by the Learning Support Educator to ensure that learners stay actively engaged in schooling and the learning process.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview process that will take place at a time that suits you via an online platform like Zoom or Whatsapp calling. During the interview process, I will ask of you to share your practices and insights around learner engagement in particular measures that you have put in place to prevent learner disengagement through your role at the schools.

Ideally, it would be one individual interview and one focus group interview with all the research participants.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

During the study and interview process as a participant in this study, you might experience inconveniences in accessing a suitable online platform and possible data cost. The researcher will endeavour to choose an online platform that is cost-effective and use minimal data. Research participants will have the choice between a Zoom meeting or a Whatsapp call.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

By participating in this study, you as a learning support teacher can highlight the critical role you play within the school and the valuable contribution you make to the well-being of the learners.

The ideal would be if the best practices of learner engagement could be shared with the broader teaching community, and in doing so, it becomes standard practise rather than best practice.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants that agree to participate in the study will not receive any payment for taking part in the study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with me during this study, and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done by anonymising the data through the use of a pseudonym. Furthermore, the data gathered will be stored in a secure computer that is password protected. The raw research data collected will only be discussed with my Supervisor.

Your biographical data, as well as the school's name where you are stationed, will not be published in the final research report. A copy of this research report will be made available to all participants, the school where the data is gathered as well as to the Western Cape Education Department. The final research report might be used in future for additional publication purposes.

The interviews that will be conducted will be audio-recorded for accuracy. These recordings will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be made available to the participant in a process called member-checking.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact **Elzahn Van der Linde** at **082 3300 503** and/or the supervisor **Mrs L Collair** at **021 808 2304**.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622) at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

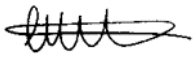
By signing below, I _____ *(name of participant)* agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by **Elzahn Van der Linde**

Signature of Participant **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.



09/07/2020

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

ADDENDUM D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview guide; Individual Interviews

The role of the learning support teacher in facilitating learner engagement in mainstream schools.

- Thank you for agreeing to an interview with me. I appreciate you taking your time and answering some of my questions.
- Are there any questions you would like to ask around the consent form?

Section A: Demographic information

Firstly, I would like to know more about you and your academic background.

Tell me more about yourself…

Ask about the following aspects:

a) Age group (How old are you?)
b) Martial status (Are you currently in a relationship?)
c) Occupation
    - Before becoming a Learning Support Teacher, what grade did you teach and for how long?
    - How long have you been a Learning Support Teacher?
    - What motivated you to become a learning support teache r?
d) Qualifications
    - Besides your education qualification, do you have any additional qualifications?
    - If you do, do you think this has helped you in any way navigating through your role as a Learning Support Teacher?

Section B: Roles and Responsibilities as a Learning Support Teacher

Thank you for sharing that information with me. Now, I would like to find out more about your roles and responsibilities as a Learning Support Teacher.

a) You mentioned that you have been a Learning Support teacher for _____ years. How long have you been at your particular school(s)?
b) What would you say is your primary role is at the school?

What would you say your responsibilities would be with regards to;

- The learners

- Responsibilities only academic level?
- Emotional support/ Self-esteem building

The school

- The parents

c) Would you view any of the work that you do as preventative or reactive? Please provide reasons for your answers.

d) What emphasis would you place on the role of the learner-teacher relationship in your current practice?

- Is it an aspect that you take time to develop?

Section C: Learning Support Interventions and Learner engagement

As mentioned during the initial stage of this interview, this study will focus on learner engagement in mainstream schools. In this section, I would now like to focus more on learner engagement and how it would relate to learning support.

a) Could you explain to me your understanding of learner engagement?

- From your understanding of learner engagement, how would you describe levels of learner engagement in your small groups?
  - If you would compare that same group of learners' levels of engagement in the mainstream classroom, how would it compare in your opinion?
    - Why do you think there is a difference?

b) What would you say is a contributing factor(s) that could influence the learners level of engagement?

- What effect would you say, learner engagement has on the overall functioning of the school?
  - Why would you feel that way?

c) How would you describe a learner who appears to be disengaged?

- Could you describe how these learners would present at school?
  - What factors within the community can contribute to this?
- In your opinion, have you been able to identify disengaged learners in your small groups?
  - What makes you think so? Please provide reasons for your answers.

d) From your perspective, how are disengaged learners encouraged to become more engaged in schooling in your current context?
    - Do you feel the school is contributing?
        - What factors within the school contribute to this?
    - Could you give me examples?

    How do you feel about this?

Section D: Learning Support Interventions as preventative practices

In the previous section, we spoke about learner engagement, I would now like to concentrate more on your everyday practices and how that relates to preventing learner disengagement (learner retention and learner dropout).

a) What is your understanding of preventative measures in Learning Support?
    - What preventative strategies do you use in your practice?
    - How do you think these support interventions serve as preventative measures?
    - What would you say make them preventative measures?

b) Please describe any specific strategies or intervention programmes that you think might facilitate learner engagement?
    - Please describe what you would consider ‘best practice’ strategies and interventions.

c) Could you provide me with an example of where you feel your direct intervention made a difference in the learner’s engagement in school or prevented learner retention? And where it did not make a difference?

d) In your opinion, how would you improve learner engagement in your current school(s)?

- In closing, thank you once again for taking the time in answering my questions. Is there anything you would like to mention that I did not?
- Furthermore, would it be in order with you to contact you in case I have any more questions?

ADDENDUM E: NARRATIVE TEXT INSTRUCTIONS

Sharing a story of your intervention with a learner who is/was at risk of disengaging from school.

Will you please share the story of your intervention with a learner who is/was at risk of disengaging from school (dropping out or being retained within a grade).

Start by telling us a little bit about the learner's difficulties and then proceed to share your experience with the learner.

Consider including

- Why was the learner referred for learning support originally?
- Some strategies that you used in the classroom to help the learner and facilitate learner engagement & classroom participation
    - Do you feel these strategies could be transferred to the mainstream classroom?
- Who else did you involve in this process? (classroom teacher, parents, school-based support team, district-based support team)
- What worked well and what would you do differently next time.
- What did you learn from the process?

❖ ***If possible, please use a different name for the learner and the school should you wish to include these details***

ADDENDUM F: PORTION OF TRANSCRIPT: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW

Transcription of the Interview with P1
Date: 15 July 2020
P1 = Participant one I= Interviewer

112. ***I:*** Yes...

113. ***P1:*** Even teachers would tell you that child use to be so quiet never asked anything...but now he also puts up his hand, trying. Even if it is wrong. He is trying. Because that is for me a big thing...that a child has confidence to ask and to try.

114. ***I:*** Yes...I think that is so important. If...uhm...so by providing them with self-esteem and emotional support you are working on the teacher-learner relationship right?

115. ***P1:*** Yes...

116. ***I:*** So what emphasis do you place on that? Do you think it is an important aspect in learning support?

117. ***P1:*** Yes. I think ... uhm ... in the end of the day that it is the more important thing...because a child can know a lot of things but don't have the confidence to to do it...uhm so I think that is the most important thing because you are building the person/child. Everyone don't have the same intelligence...some children are are more practical and some children are more academic...and if you can build the child's self-esteem they would realize that the way they view themselves is not just based on academics. I can also do something else but then you have to develop the holistic person..the child...to be able to look into themselves to look at... even if I cant do this ...I can do something else. I am a person on myself...that is actually to me more important...then then anything else.

118. ***I:*** Just the last question in this section, would you view your work as preventative or reactive? Could you please provide reasons for your answer.

119. ***P1:*** I think preventative...because if we react it means the damage is done already. Preventative means to me that before that child is in that space where nothing can be done we have build him up and we have build all the bricks, all the layers are there...so before the child can be in that space where he or she thinks... uhm... I can do nothing we have started to help. We have started to build. So I think it is preventative...preventing the child from feeling worthless and feeling he cant do anything.

120. ***I:*** Ok...and then just in case...like you spoke about the shine programme with the parents, could you just give me a few more details because I uhm, I have a feeling that those programmes are also more preventative.

121. ***P1:*** Yes...uhm the shine and the ready steady read write right?

122. ***I:*** Yes.

123. ***P1:*** We uhm take the learners that uhm is... is struggling a little and uhm what I like about it the children come and these ladies are sitting there but they are more mother figures. Remember they are not trained teachers so they have compassion and the sympathy and they are sitting with the learners. They are there volunteering so the learners come there and they are giving the learners these positive uhmm uhmm feedback and they are focusing on positive things and building on the self-esteem. The child can't leave if they don't get a little letter saying what they have done this today...this was good today. So we are always building on positive...not necessarily the academics...

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.4 Differences in learners behaviour/academic achievement after attending learning support

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.4 Differences in learners behaviour/academic achievement after attending learning support

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.3 Learners being referred for learning support

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

Transcription of the Interview with P1
Date: 15 July 2020
P1 = Participant one I= Interviewer

124. ***I:*** Yes…

125. ***P1:*** The ladies wil perhaps say to the child uhm I love the way you work…uhm you wanted the answers the questions today…so it is all these positive feedback that does not necessarily have to do with academics.

126. ***I:*** Ja…

127. ***P1:*** These ladies are working on the children's self-esteem a lot…and uhm it is interesting that the children want to make appointments to come to them outside of their time to come and talk to them… and the children also talk to them about things that bother them so it is also like a little session where they can talk about uhm things that bother them at home, personal things…but it is not a counselling session. There is still academics involved but the ladies are there to listen.

128. ***I:*** Yes…

129. ***P1:*** So for uhm for me… you know in the class with 35 or 40 children the teacher is very busy and the teacher don't always have the time to listen to little…little Johanny…that comes with the stress of today.

130. ***I:*** Yes…

131. ***P1:*** These ladies they they they are there and listen and uhm the children enjoy coming there they love coming to the ladies.

133. ***P1:*** Yes.

134. ***I:*** That sounds like a very special programme and I am glad (clears throat) and I am glad that you have initiated that in your schools. Uhmm so now we are going to move on to learner engagement as that is one of my major constructs being researched. So just could you explain to me your own understanding of what you think learner engagement is?

135. ***P1:*** Uhmm learner engagement is uhmm what we do to get the child uhm interested in in taking part in whatever we are busy with. Uhm the child's come there already down…feeling they uhm "I am not doing well in class " and so getting the then getting the child to participate and be part of the lesson that is what I think it is uhm and that the child coming in there and being part and participating and feeling that I can be part of this…

136. ***I:*** Ok…

137. ***P1:*** …what is happening here.

138. ***I*** So from that I understanding how would you describe your learner engagement in your small little groups? When you are busy with that one on one's.

139. ***P1:*** I think uhm I think… most of the time…95% of the time very successful because for me a way to see that is how the children participate…how they speak their mind…how they feel…what they understand and children because we are not in the mainstream children having fun uhmm when they go out of my class… I want them to be in a better space than when they came in…seeing that uhm yes learners are very much involved in in in what happening.

user
Theme 3: Participants understanding of learner disengagement
3.3 Factors contributing to learner disengagement

user
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learner engagement
2.1 Understanding of learner engagement

user
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learner engagement
2.1 Understanding of learner engagement

user
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learner engagement
2.2 Indicators/behaviour of learner engagement

user
Theme 4: Participants understanding of learning support
4.2 Roles and responsibilities

user October 27, 2020
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learner engagement
2.2 Indicators/behaviour of learner engagement
Reply Resolve

ADDENDUM G: PORTION OF A CODED NARRATIVE TEXT

because I have also activated Adobe Read aloud on the device and navigated the learner how to listen to his subject notes. The learner takes keenly to the tablet and also has access to a dictionary application that allows him to listen to correct word pronunciation and meaning. The tablet has internet access which allows the learner to research topics and access You Tube videos with the help of the LST and subject teacher. Google translate also allows for translation between Afrikaans and English to understand unfamiliar English vocabulary. The learner's family also communicates in Afrikaans at home but he prefers speaking English. Furthermore, he can use his strength of drawing to summarise concepts or information of subjects in the Paint application and can update his drawings during lesson sessions. The learner however only has access to the tablet during school hours as it remains at school because it is the school's property. The learner does not have access to a cellular phone and unfortunately could not participate in the LS Covid19 lockdown LitPro Programme because it was presented on what's app platform. The LitPro learner book was available

user Theme 1: Participants

to be collected from school but the learner's family is illiterate and hence no collection of the book or other subject notes. The following has been implemented during Term 3, 2020 examination/test weeks although he only attended English Home Language; Afrikaans; Geography and Mathematics Tests.

1) One-on-one and paired Learning Support sessions
2) Learner could research and choose picture cues for English Prepared Speech and delivered his Speech to the subject teacher using visual cues
3) Concessions of Reader and Scribe accommodation and more time
4) Learner completed English Paper Three – including Mind mapping; Essay and Transactional writing with the Reader and Scribe service rendered.
5) Learner completed English Paper Two; Literature with the Reader and Scribe service rendered.
6) Adaptation of English Home Language Paper 3
7) Learner completed Afrikaans Paper Two and Three with Reader and Scribe service rendered

- LST has also collaborated with an Art Centre in a different community to expose the learner to art lessons in an attempt to develop and refine his gift/interest to make his learning process more effective.
- LSA has donated a personal tablet to the learner and LST will load programmes during October 2020 week holiday to assist learner.

The learner comes from a single parent background and lives with his mother, grandparents and five other siblings in RDP housing. His mother is illiterate and he often goes with his grandfather to do temporary bricklaying. The family mainly survives on government grants for sustenance. It is difficult for the learner to stay motivated to attend school

user
Theme 3: Participants experience of learning support
Subtheme 3.2: Roles and responsibilities

user
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learning support
Subtheme 2.3: Factors contributing to learner disengagement

user
Theme 2: Participants understanding of learning support
Subtheme 2.3: Factors contributing to learner disengagement

ADDENDUM H: REFLECTIVE FIELD NOTES

Reflective field notes: Semi-structured interviews

Date of interview: 22 July 2020

Participant: P2

Section 1: Observations during the interviews

1. **Observations during the interview**

The participant is new to the field of learning support has more than five years of teaching experience. Due to her additional qualifications, it felt as though her frame of mind or experience was much more directed towards classroom management and school management. She answered most questions from that perspective, and at times I found it challenging to get her to think a bit broader. The participant furthermore also struggled to understand the construct of learner engagement from the perspective of the learner – she automatically viewed the construct from the perspective of the teacher's engagement with the learner – how she engages.

Section 2: Research methods

2. **What happened during the interview in terms of the method of data collection?**

The participant was very talkative and at times answered questions before I could ask – due it being my second interview opportunity, I felt confident in changing the order of some of the questions and leaving some out. The participant struggled to answer questions around the construct of learner engagement. The interview guide felt extensive for this participant as she enjoyed talking about her own 'journey' into learning support.

Section 3: Personal reflection notes

3. **What was my personal experience during the interview?**

I felt as though I was not 100% in charge of the interview – at times, I found it difficult to steer the interview into the direction it should go. During this

interview, it felt as though my relationship with the participant made it harder or hampered the process of data collection as she at times went off-topic. I was feeling as though the data I gathered was not rich enough to provide insight into answering my questions.

ADDENDUM I: CERTIFICATE OF COPY EDITING

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To whom it may concern:

This certifies that I, Lydia Searle, performed the copy edit for the thesis titled "The role of the learning support teacher in facilitating learner engagement" for submission to Stellenbosch University by Ms Elzahn van der Linde.

Citation format and language, grammar, punctuation and layout issues were addressed according to the style required by Stellenbosch University using MSWord Review (Track Changes) function.

The reference list was not edited as requested by the author.

The *opsomming* was not included in the edit.

I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the authors or any other party subsequent to my edit.

Yours faithfully,

Lydia Searle

Member: Professional Editors' Guild RSA (PEG)

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